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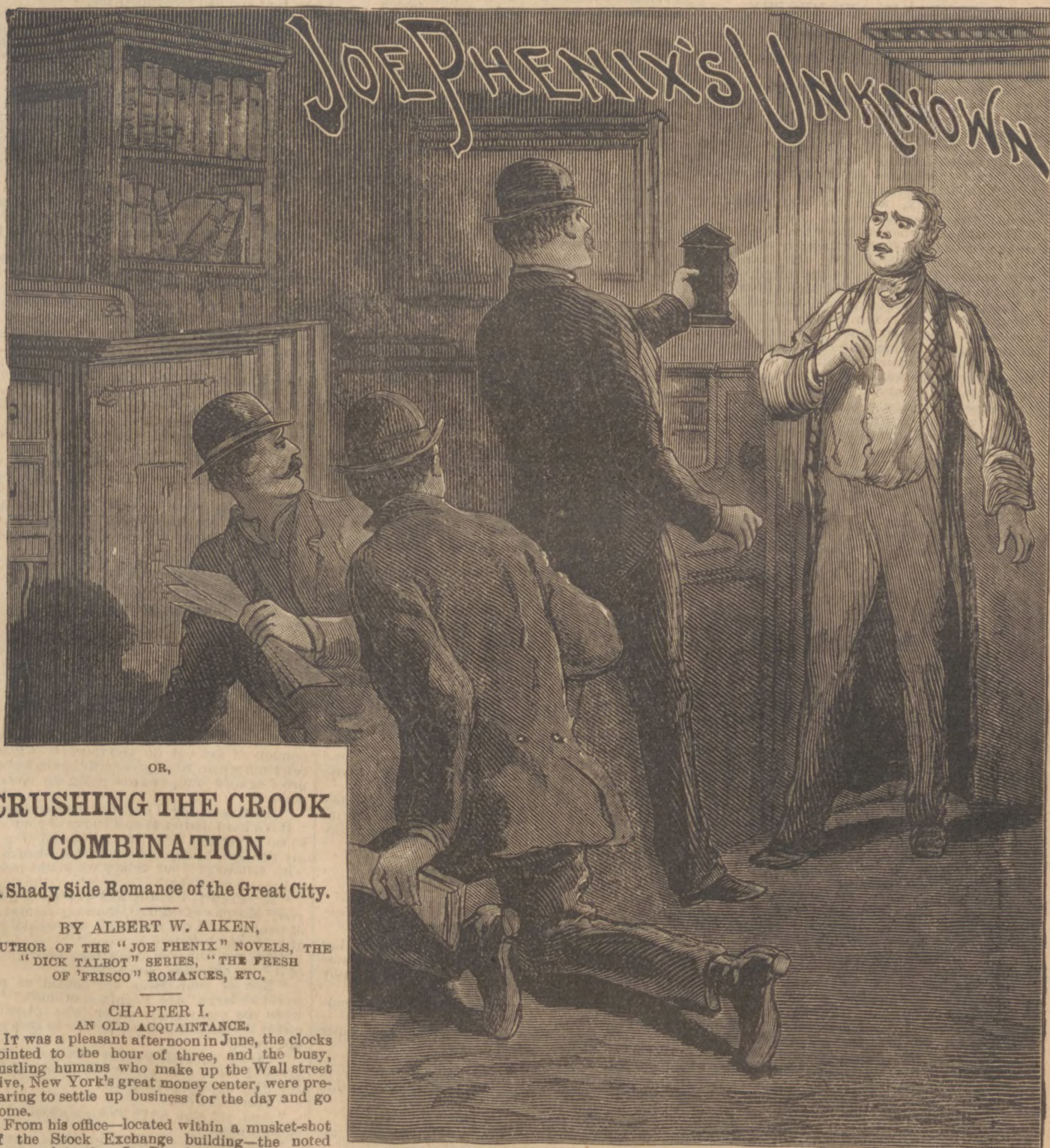
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OR,

CRUSHING THE CROOK COMBINATION.

A Shady Side Romance of the Great City.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF THE "JOE PHENIX" NOVELS, THE
"DICK TALBOT" SERIES, "THE FRESH
OF 'FRISCO" ROMANCES, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

It was a pleasant afternoon in June, the clocks pointed to the hour of three, and the busy, bustling humans who make up the Wall street hive, New York's great money center, were preparing to settle up business for the day and go home.

From his office—located within a musket-shot of the Stock Exchange building—the noted veteran detective, Joe Phenix, descended to the street.

THE COMBINATION TURNED IN ALARM, AND THE RAYS OF THE DARK LANTERN HELD IN THE CRACKSMAN'S HAND FELL FULL ON THE FIGURE OF THE MINISTER.

As the reader knows, who has followed the fortunes of this most indefatigable bloodhound, as related in the series of novels of which he has been the hero, for a number of years Joe Phenix had been doing business on his own account, conducting a private detective establishment, paying particular attention to Wall street business.

Joe Phenix went up the street to Broadway and joined the human tide now setting so strongly to the northward.

The veteran detective sauntered on, apparently not paying any particular attention to anything about him, and yet in reality seeing every thing with his keen, hawk-like eyes, until on a street corner he was compelled to halt on account of a passing team.

As he stopped on the curbstone his gaze fell on a man going down the cross street on the opposite side of the way.

He was a well-dressed gentleman of forty or thereabouts, with dark hair and a full beard, short and neatly trimmed, which was sprinkled with silver, and he had a peculiar, jaunty air which seemed to suggest he was no stranger to military service.

"Hello! there is an old acquaintance," the detective ejaculated the moment his gaze fell on the man.

"The beard changes his appearance considerably, but I recognize him despite that fact."

A few doors down the street the gentleman disappeared in the doorway of an office and Joe Phenix took a look at the sign over the portal.

"BENHANAN AND MURPHY,

Bankers and Brokers,"

was what the sign said, and the detective read the words aloud.

"He is not sailing under false colors, at all events," Joe Phenix commented. "Murphy was the name he bore when I knew him, but I did not expect to see him blossom out in this line."

Just at this moment a neatly-dressed, well-built, resolute-looking man of thirty-two or three came up behind Joe Phenix and slapped him familiarly on the shoulder.

"Well, Phenix, what are you meditating about?" the new-comer asked.

The veteran turned and saw that the speaker was the detective, Ned Fitzgerald, one of the best men of the Central Office, who, in company with another thief-taker of equal merit, was detailed to look out for the Wall street district.

The pair, being well acquainted with all the prominent crooks in the country, made it their business to see that none of the light-fingered gentry did any loafing in the Wall street region.

If a crook was found within the limits of the money-center, he was immediately told that he must get out, and at the same time warned not to trespass there again, under penalty of being locked up, the detectives going upon the idea that an ounce of prevention was worth a pound of cure.

"Ah, Fitzgerald, you are just the man I want to see," the veteran remarked.

"Is that so? It is fortunate I came along then."

"Yes; let us step back out of the way so we can talk without being disturbed."

The two retired a few steps down the cross street, so as to get out of the passing crowd.

"See that sign across the street, Benhanan & Murphy?" Joe Phenix asked.

The other nodded assent.

"Do you know anything about the parties?"

"Yes; they are new-comers in this locality, although one of them, Benhanan, is an old hand on the 'Street.'"

"Are they all right?"

"Well, that is a difficult question to answer, and a simple yes or no will not cover the ground," the detective observed in a thoughtful way.

"Benhanan is a Jew—Levi Benhanan is his full name—and he bears the reputation on the Street of being a wily and unscrupulous man, but although he has been mixed up in some shady transactions, yet he has always been able to arrange the affairs so the law has never got a chance at him."

"And this other man, Murphy?"

"I don't know much about him," Fitzgerald replied. "He is a stranger."

"Of course, when the firm started in to do business, I made a point of seeing what they were up to, having received a quiet tip about them," the detective continued.

"The pair are running a 'bucket-shop,' as the Wall street men call these little cribs where a man can put up five dollars as a 'margin' and be allowed to speculate on the rise or fall of stocks. As long as the fellows give their patrons anything like a square deal, and no complaints are made, the law can't get at them, although nine out of ten of such places usually bust up and swindle everybody who has dealings with them, in the end."

"Yes, that is one of the peculiarities of our modern civilization," Joe Phenix observed. "It is against the law to bet on a game of cards, but people can wager money on the rise and fall of stocks, and the world calls it business."

Very true! We men in the Wall street district don't use any ceremony in warning any

crooks whom we may find in the Territory that their room is a deal better than their company, but when a couple of this kind hang out their shingle we are obliged to let them alone, although it is about as certain as anything can be that the concern will wind up with a grand smash."

"Murphy is a stranger?"

"Yes, he is a new man in the country, I believe. The supposition is that he is the party who is finding the money for the firm. Benhanan has the experience and Murphy the cash, and the Wall street sharps soon got off the old joke that, in a short time, Murphy will have the experience and the Jew the money."

"Well, for once the boys are out in their reckoning, I think," Joe Phenix observed, in his quiet way. "For Murphy is no guileless innocent to be plundered by the Jew; on the contrary, he is a sharper from Sharperville."

"Ah, you are posted in regard to the man then?" Fitzgerald inquired.

"Oh, yes, I think I am," Joe Phenix replied. "It is one of those cases where I cannot speak from positive proof, you understand, for the man is a first-class rascal, and was smart enough to play his game so I was not able to trap him."

"I secured ample evidence to satisfy myself as to just what kind of a man he was, although it wasn't anywhere near strong enough for me to go into court with the hope of convicting him."

"I comprehend," Fitzgerald remarked. "I know there is a great difference between getting evidence enough to convince men in our line, and proof strong enough to swing a jury."

"Exactly! Do you remember the mysterious death of a young woman at Tarrytown about a year ago?"

"Yes, I do, for I took a little try at the case myself, but I wasn't able to do anything, although from what I discovered about the affair I became satisfied there was a strong probability the woman had come to her death by foul means."

"Not a doubt about it!" the veteran detective declared, decidedly.

"I ran the game to earth and nabbed the three men who were concerned in the crime," he continued. "The job was planned by this Murphy, who is a first-class, all-around crook from across the water, a fellow away up at the top of the heap, to my thinking, who has, probably, operated in all the principal countries of Europe."

"Got too hot for him over there, I suppose, and so he thought he would try his luck in the new world," Fitzgerald suggested.

"Yes, it is probable. Well, connected with him in the Tarrytown affair were two others; a man named Trevanion, who was the husband of the woman, and Peter Slam, the Dangerous Blacksmith, the fellow who did the killing," Joe Phenix explained.

"I knew Dangerous well," the detective observed.

"It was a difficult game to work, but I finally got things so I thought I could do something, and I nabbed all three, but the scheme didn't go through, for the Dangerous Blacksmith was killed by the officers when they arrested him, and Trevanion committed suicide in prison."

"Yes, I remember the circumstances now that you recall them."

"The deaths upset my calculations completely, and I was obliged to release Murphy for I had not secured proof enough to hold him. It was my idea that I could make the Dangerous Blacksmith turn State's evidence, for fellows of his stamp often squeal on their pals when they get in a tight place and cannot see any other way of getting out."

"That is the old game, and it generally goes through all right, too."

"Now you know what kind of a man Murphy is, and it will not do any harm for you to keep your eyes upon him, for the odds are big that this bucket-shop is but a blind, and he has come down here into the money region for the purpose of making a big stake."

"No doubt!" Fitzgerald exclaimed. "Much obliged to you for the tip, and you can depend upon my keeping my eyes upon the gentleman."

Then the two parted.

CHAPTER II.

COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

JOE PHENIX continued on up Broadway, but before he had gone a block he heard his name called, and upon looking around he saw Murphy hastening after him.

"Hello! What does this mean?" he murmured, in surprise.

"This is Mr. Phenix, I think?" the new-comer said, in a very friendly way.

"That is my name."

"You remember me, of course. A man in your line must have a good memory—Captain Gordon Murphy?"

"Oh, yes, I remember you."

"My dear Mr. Phenix, could you grant me the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation?"

"Certainly."

The two were at a street corner.

"There is a saloon a few doors down, and if you will have the kindness to join me in a social glass, we can take a table where we can converse at our ease."

"I am agreeable," the veteran detective remarked.

The two proceeded down the street to the saloon, which they entered and took a table in a quiet corner.

"What shall it be—a small bottle?" Murphy asked in the most affable manner.

"No wine for me, thank you," the detective replied. "A glass of ale will do equally as well."

"Just as you like."

And then Murphy ordered a bottle of ale.

When the liquor was brought the captain filled the glasses, and then with a polite bow said, as he raised his glass:

"Here is to our better acquaintance, Mr. Phenix."

"I will drink the toast although I have my doubts as to its being wise on your part to desire such a thing," the detective remarked, dryly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Murphy as he sipped his ale, "that is pretty good! I see that you are a man who indulges in a joke once in awhile, but I am glad you spoke as you did for that leads up to what I wanted to talk about."

"That is fortunate."

"As I turned from Broadway into the side street where my office is located I noticed you on the opposite corner, and from the expression on your face I immediately jumped to the conclusion that you had recognized me."

"Correct! I did."

"And the thought at once came into my mind that it was very likely you would take it into your head to make some inquiries about me."

"A natural conclusion."

"So, after I entered my office I took a sly glance through the window in order to see what you were up to, therefore I am aware that you held a conversation with Detective Fitzgerald, and from the way in which you looked at my office I got the impression that my humble self was the subject of your conversation."

"That is correct—you were."

"I trust, Mr. Phenix, that you did not take the trouble to go out of your way to say anything against me," Murphy remarked, softly, and in a very insinuating way.

"Now you want me to tell you the truth of course!" Joe Phenix exclaimed, abruptly.

"Why, certainly!"

"Even if it is unpleasant?"

"Well, yes," Murphy replied, evidently annoyed. "I put the question with the idea of learning the truth."

"Well, as I am a plain, straight-forward man I haven't any objection in answering you," the detective responded, in his calm, deliberate way.

"I see that you know Fitzgerald, and, of course understand just what his business is in this district. You know me too, and I do not wonder that when you saw me conversing with the detective the thought came to you that it was likely I would post Fitzgerald as to the kind of man you are."

"But really, Mr. Phenix, to come right down to the truth, you don't know much of anything about me," Murphy argued, in his most insinuating way.

"You may suspect that I am so and so, you know, but you could not go into court and prove it," he continued. "And, under the circumstances, I don't think you ought to say anything against me."

"Now, Murphy, as I told you, I am a plain, straight-forward man, and I am not going to beat about the bush," Joe Phenix responded. "From what I know of you, if I wasn't able to tell just what kind of a man you are it would be proof positive that I had better get out of the detective business."

"Oh, well, I suppose you have a pretty bad opinion of me, but do you think it is right to condemn a man when you really haven't got any proof against him, and are going on mere suspicion?"

"Most certainly I do!" the detective replied.

"It is a hard matter to nail a man of your stamp so as to get him dead to rights, and if men in my line didn't jump to a conclusion when dealing with fellows of your kidney we would never be able to do anything."

"Mr. Phenix, I really had a better opinion of you!" Murphy exclaimed, showing decided signs of temper. "I did not think you would go out of your way to injure any one."

"Ah, yes, but you don't take the right view of it," the detective responded.

"Men of your stamp are dangerous to the world at large," Joe Phenix continued. "And when you masquerade under false colors it becomes the duty of every detective to keep an eye upon you."

"I am to understand then that you told Fitzgerald I was a man who would bear watching?" the other exclaimed, angrily.

"I certainly did."

"And yet you have not an atom of proof against me!"

"Not evidence enough to convince a jury that you are a crook of the first water I will admit," Joe Phenix rejoined. "But if you keep on as

you began I will be able to get you dead to rights one of these days.

"Thanks to the lucky chance, for you, that one of your pals committed suicide, and the other was killed by the officer in resisting arrest, I was not able to nail you in the Tarrytown case, although I was satisfied you were the man who planned the game, but as I told you when you slipped through my fingers that time, sooner or later I would get you in such a position that you could not escape, unless you changed your way of life."

"Oh, yes, I know that you were angry because you did not succeed in holding me, although you hadn't a bit of proof to back up your accusation," Murphy declared, indignantly. "And now you have descended to persecution in order to get square. I would not have believed that a man of your reputation would be mean enough to try such a game!"

"There isn't any use for you to show temper in regard to this matter," Joe Phenix rejoined. "And when you talk about persecution you are away off. You are not looking at the matter in the right light."

"You are an old and experienced crook—a man who lives by preying upon his fellow-men, a human wild beast, so to speak; your hand is against your kind, and it is the duty of all men in my line of business to do their best to upset your games."

"You have no proof that this is correct!" Murphy exclaimed in an extremely sulky way.

"You are only going upon suspicion!"

"Oh, no! I obtained evidence enough about you in the Tarrytown case to satisfy me that you were the man who hatched the plot, although the proof was in such a shape that I could not hope to bring the crime home to you."

"I would not be fit for the position I occupy if I could be deceived by even so accomplished a crook as yourself," the detective continued.

"The moment I discovered that you had taken up your quarters in this locality I knew you were up to some deep game, and so I took pains to warn Fitzgerald."

"And you don't consider that to be persecution, hey?" Murphy demanded, indignantly.

"No, I do not, for if you are acting on the square you have nothing to fear either from me or from Fitzgerald, or, for that matter, from any detective. You can pursue your business with the certainty that no one will trouble you, but if you are unwise enough to try any crooked work you will surely be caught."

"Well, Mr. Detective, I presume that you and your associates are very great creatures, but I, for one, am not at all afraid, for you are only human, like myself—just common clay, you know," Murphy declared in a sullen and defiant way. "But there is one thing I want you to take into consideration, and that is that when a man is hounded and persecuted he is mighty apt to turn on the men who are trying to injure him!"

"Murphy, you are not as wise a man as I thought," Joe Phenix remarked with a weighty shake of the head.

"You are too old a stager to try a game of this kind, for you ought to know that it will not do you any good to threaten me, although it may give you a little satisfaction, but that is a very cheap luxury, which may be dearly bought, though, if the threat puts me on my guard so you will not be able to accomplish anything."

"You have a good opinion of yourself, I see; but you must not make the mistake of thinking there are no other men in the world able to match you!" Murphy exclaimed, sarcastically.

"Well, whatever my faults may be, I am quite sure I never make the mistake of showing my hand to my opponent until the end of the game," the detective retorted. "And, really, in regard to this matter, it is just as I told you: keep straight—don't try any crooked work, and no one will trouble you."

Then the detective rose to his feet as if to signify that he considered the interview at an end.

Murphy also rose.

"Well, Mr. Detective, I am not at all alarmed by your threats, and I take this opportunity of saying that if I am interfered with in any manner by you, or your associates, somebody will be apt to get hurt," the Irishman declared.

"Don't waste your breath, man, in idle threats, for the indulgence will not do you any good," and then the detective departed.

Murphy followed him, halted on the steps of the saloon, watching Phenix until the detective turned into Broadway and disappeared from sight, then he proceeded slowly up the street, taking the same course which the detective had followed.

As he went on, Murphy's thoughts found vent in words.

"The man was right enough when he said I was not wise to indulge in threats; but I lost my temper, and when a man allows his anger to get the best of him he generally makes a fool of himself," Murphy muttered.

"I did not make any mistake, though, when I made up my mind to see how matters stood," he continued. "I felt sure when I saw this bloodhound and Fitzgerald in conversation that the pair were talking about me. I was correct in

my conjecture, too, and now that I know the pair are onto me, I shall understand that I must keep a sharp lookout.

"It is a mighty unlucky piece of business!" he exclaimed with a dark frown.

"The knowledge that one is spied upon by a couple of the best man-hunters in the business is apt to make a fellow nervous."

"Even an old hand, like myself, can't play his game with perfect freedom, if he is hampered by the thought that the fly-cops are on the watch, ready to pounce upon him if he is unlucky enough to make any mistake."

"The accident which brought me to the notice of this cursed Phenix was a mighty unlucky one, and I am deucedly sorry that it occurred."

"The man has got it in for me because I succeeded in slipping through his fingers when he tried to nail me on account of the Tarrytown affair, and so I must be on my guard, for he will do his best to put me behind the bars, but as forewarned is forearmed I may be able to baffle this bloodhound."

A car coming along at this moment brought Murphy's meditations to a close, for he got on board and proceeded up-town.

CHAPTER III.

THE GENTLEMAN FROM LONDON.

MURPHY rode up-town as far as the Fifth Avenue Hotel and there alighted.

As he stepped on the curbstone he came face to face with two well-dressed gentlemen whose general appearances unmistakably indicated that they were Englishmen.

"Well, this is a surprise!" Murphy exclaimed, as he advanced toward the two with outstretched hand.

The pair recognized Murphy immediately and greeted him with the utmost cordiality.

"Old fellow! we are deuced glad to see you!" the taller of the two Englishmen exclaimed.

"Oh, yes," his companion assented. "It is a good piece of luck to run across an old pal, like you!"

And in order that the reader shall understand just what kind of men these two English transplants were, whom Murphy was so pleased to see, we will introduce them.

The tall fellow, with the dark, thin face, lit up by piercing black eyes, was called Aaron Crickton, and from his peculiar complexion had acquired the name of Blackie.

He was no stranger to the police, both of England and the Continent, and bore the reputation of being one of the most expert safe-cracksmen in the world.

Being a natural-born mechanic, possessed of really wonderful skill in the use of tools, the ease with which he "cracked" safes which were fondly supposed by the makers and owners to be able to bid defiance to all midnight marauders, was a source of great amazement to the world at large.

His companion was a dapper little fellow, with a sharp face, which always wore a knowing air.

He had been a pal of Blackie for years, although not rated to be as expert as his companion, but the two, taken together, were regarded as being a pair of cracksmen whose equals did not exist.

The smaller man was known as Charles Thomason, but, as is usual among the crooks, he had a nickname.

Clever Charley was his *alias*.

"You are about the last man that I expected to see on this side of the herring-pond!" Murphy declared, after the hand-shaking was over.

"Ah, well, gentlemen in our line, you know, often have to travel for the benefit of our health," Crickton replied.

"Yes, you see, we are gentle kind of dicky birds, and the climate sometimes gets too hot for us," Clever Charley asserted.

"And when anything of that kind takes place we spread our wings and fly away," Crickton continued.

"I understand," Murphy observed with a knowing smile. "I have been in the same box myself and comprehend the situation."

"We heard that you were in this country, but we hadn't any idea we would run across you on the first day of our sojourn in Yankee land," Crickton remarked.

"Have you just arrived?" Murphy asked.

"Got in this morning about ten o'clock," Crickton answered.

"But, I say, old pal, you are looking pretty well," he continued with a critical glance at the other. "You seem to be in fine feather so I suppose you have done tolerably well since you crossed the water."

"I haven't any cause to complain," Murphy replied. "This is a good country for men of genius, and fellows of the right stamp, who understand their business, have no trouble in getting along."

"But I say, talking is dry work," Murphy remarked, abruptly. "Suppose we go somewhere and wet our whistles?"

"All right, my covey!" Crickton exclaimed. "An invitation to drink is always in order."

"There is an English ale-house, or a chop-house, as they call them here in New York, a few doors from Broadway on one of the cross streets a little way up, and there we can have a

glass, in a quiet corner, where we can talk to our hearts' content," Murphy explained.

"It is just the place for a house of call for men in our line," the captain continued. "For the man who keeps it—Jack Toney is his name—is one of the right sort."

"He used to be a fighting man in England, and the old coves, who know him well, say he has 'done time' for housebreaking, and that was the reason why he came to this country. He was lucky enough to escape from the stone jug, and after he was free lost no time in getting over the water, so the 'bobbies' couldn't nab him again."

"I don't know how true that report is, of course, but it is my belief it is correct, for he is always glad to see men in our line—that is, you understand, high-toby cracksmen who know enough not to get him into any trouble."

"That is the kind of a house of call that Clever here and myself always patronize," Crickton remarked.

"We never go to any of the low dens where common, vulgar scoundrels are to be found," he continued. "We claim to be away up at the head of our business, and we don't care to mix with the small fry."

"Oh, no, we are very particular about that sort of thing," Clever Charley declared. "A man is known by the company he keeps, and we do not associate with the low-grade rascals, who are content to eke out a miserable existence by priggish handkerchiefs and robbing hen-roosts."

"You will not find any men of that kidney in this place," Murphy responded.

"It is a resort for sports of all kinds, gamblers, horsemen, and the better class of pugilists, and a few high-grade gentlemen who make a living by the use of their wits, nobs like ourselves, you understand."

"Oh, yes; well, that is the kind of society we have been used to since we made our mark in the professional world," Crickton remarked. "So we will feel at home."

"Come along then!" said Murphy.

The two faced about and went with the captain up Broadway.

"Where are we putting up, by the way?" Murphy asked.

And to his surprise the two laughed outright at the question.

"Why do you laugh?" the captain asked. "I don't see anything funny about it."

"Of course it is not apparent to you now, but it will be after I explain," Crickton replied. "You see, we had to cut and run from London on account of a little job we did there in the jewelry line."

"We got in with a bloke who was in a gem shop, a fellow who had an ambition to see life, and so we put him through the paces," Clever Charley explained, with a chuckle.

"And after we got him in good running order, when his cash began to fall short, we suggested that he could make a raise by helping himself to a few diamonds."

"Ah, yes, I have worked a trick of that kind myself," Murphy remarked.

"But it is generally very risky business, though," he continued. "For fellows of that sort never have any backbone, and if a smart detective gets after them, the chances are great that the cove will squeal and give the scheme away."

"We worked the trick very carefully, for we were apprehensive that something of that kind might happen," Crickton explained.

"Both of us took false names and pretended we were from the North of England, just come down to London to see the sights of the big city, and, mind you, we didn't advise our man to steal the sparklers outright, but only to take and pawn them for awhile, saying he could redeem them just as soon as he got in funds, but on the way to the pawnshop some rascally thief managed to rob the jewelry nob of the diamonds."

"Oho! that was well worked!" Murphy declared, with an approving nod.

"Well, I think myself that the idea was not a bad one," Crickton remarked, complacently.

"We advised the jewelry chap to keep a stiff upper lip, and to put a notice in the newspapers offering a reward for the sparklers, under a false name, of course, but he did not have as much pluck even as I gave him credit for."

"Ah, no!" Clever Charley exclaimed, shaking his head in a melancholy way. "He weakened in the most disgusting manner."

"Yes, and the cur laid all the blame on us, saying that it was our fault, for if we had not advised him to take the diamonds, he could not have lost them," Crickton related.

"Oh, yes, that is the way such lads always act," Murphy declared. "They like to dance well enough, but when it comes to paying the piper, they kick up a terrible row."

"We saw from the way the fellow went on that it was almost certain he would make a clean breast of it to his employers as soon as any inquiry was made about the diamonds, and so we cut and run for France as soon as possible," Crickton explained.

"In Paris we called on an old friend of ours, and he allowed us a hundred pounds for the

sparklers. They were well worth two hundred and fifty, but none of the 'fences' are ever willing to do the fair thing."

"That is true enough!" Murphy exclaimed. "We do the work—run all the risk, and the old scoundrels are never disposed to give over a quarter of what a thing is worth."

"After we got the money we made our way to Scotland, and there took passage for New York, thus getting out of the way before any row was kicked up about the gems," Crickton continued.

"And now comes the funny part of the story," he added.

"Of course, it was necessary for us to cover up our tracks as much as possible, for it was certain that when the clerk confessed that he had lost the sparklers, suspicion would be directed to us, for the man would not fail to give as correct a description of our persons as possible, and some keen-witted detective might be able to spot us."

"Very likely, indeed!" Murphy remarked.

So we sailed under the name of Howard-Randolph and Percy Howard, brothers, you understand, men of good family, but being rather poor in pocket we had decided to come to Yankee land for the purpose of bettering our fortunes."

"That was a good game to play!" Murphy declared. "And as there are plenty of Englishmen, both young and old, who are trying that experiment every week in the year the story was a probable one."

"But here we are at the street, and there is the chop-house," he continued. "So you can complete your story over a mug of ale."

A few moments later the three were seated at a table in a quiet corner of the chop-house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CROOK'S PROPOSAL.

THE landlord, a big, burly fellow, a typical beef-fed, beer-drinking Briton, was behind the little bar, and Captain Murphy introduced the 'brothers' as being new-arrived Englishers, men whom he could recommend as being the right sort, which statement procured for the pair a warm greeting from the burly landlord.

"Now then, go ahead with your story!" Murphy exclaimed after the three had taken a draught of the ale.

"We did our best on board ship to act up to our assumed characters," Crickton responded.

"There was a full passenger list, and as there were plenty of other men going to America to seek their fortune, just as we pretended we were doing, we had little fear of the detectives getting on our track."

"There were a half a dozen actors on board, jolly fellows every one, and we got quite thick with them, so much so, that one soft young fellow actually suggested we might do well to adopt the stage as a profession, saying that he thought from what he had seen of us that we were cut out for actors."

"Well, the man was not far out of the way in his surmise," Murphy observed in a reflective way. "For there is no doubt that in your time both of you have played many parts."

"When the suggestion was made it immediately occurred to me that it would not be a bad idea for us to pretend that we thought of adopting the advice."

"Then, you see, we could make an appearance in New York in the guise of actors seeking engagements, and it would be a smart detective indeed who would suspect that we were a couple of accomplished cracksmen."

"The idea was an excellent one!" Murphy declared.

"That was the conclusion to which Charley and I came after we talked the matter over," Crickton observed.

"This young fellow had been in America before, and said he knew a nice, quiet boarding-house, mainly patronized by theatrical people, where we could find accommodation at reasonable rates while we were waiting for the engagement to come along, and so when we landed we went along with this young chap."

"Ah, yes, and now I comprehend why you laughed when I inquired in regard to your abiding-place," Murphy remarked.

"But, joking aside, old pals, the dodge you have worked is a capital one," he continued.

"As a couple of English actors, in search of engagements, you can loaf around town without exciting the suspicions of some watchful detective, and causing him to inquire what little game you are up to, anyway."

"Yes, and we can keep our eyes open, too, and may be able to find some job in our line which will be worth doing," Crickton suggested.

"That is just what I was going to speak about," Murphy declared.

"You know me of old, pals, and, I presume, you understand I am not a man who wastes words when it comes to a business matter," he continued.

"I was glad to see you, of course, because you were always good pals of mine, and doubly glad to meet you, because I need the aid of two such men as you are, for I can put up a little game

which, if it goes through all right, will put a good many dollars in our pockets."

Blackie rubbed his hands gleefully together, while Clever Charley chuckled with delight.

"Well, now, I wish I may die if this isn't what I call a rare piece of luck!" Crickton exclaimed.

"We always were lucky, old pal!" Clever Charley declared.

"This is a game which I cannot work myself, for it is out of my line," Murphy explained.

"That is, I mean the actual getting at the money," he added.

"I can arrange all else but that," he continued. "The entrance into the house I can secure, and I know exactly where the swag is kept, but when it comes to cracking the safe, that is a job I cannot do."

"But Clever and I are right at home when it comes to a game of that kind!" Crickton declared. "Hey, Clever?"

"Oh, yes, we have done a lot of work in that line since we have been traveling together," Clever Charley observed.

"And though I am not given to bragging, yet I must say there are precious few strong boxes that we ever tried to crack which we did not succeed in getting into, unless by unlucky accident we were disturbed before we had time to do our work," he continued.

"That is certainly the truth," Crickton asserted.

"This job is not a difficult one; that is, not to men like you two who thoroughly understand your business," Murphy observed.

"The safe is in a private house up-town, in the brown-stone district, as the locality is called where the nobs live," he explained.

"It is in a minister's house."

"Oho!" Crickton exclaimed, apparently surprised.

"This is something out of the common run," Clever Charley commented.

"Blackie and I have cracked safes in all sorts of places, banks, offices, shops, lumber and coal-yards, iron works, in fact, in all kinds of manufacturing establishments, but we never cracked a parson's crib yet."

"As a rule they are not worth the cracking," Crickton observed.

"I suppose this man must be different from the common run or else you wouldn't suggest our going into the scheme."

"You are quite right in regard to that," Murphy replied. "I am not the kind of man to waste my time in planning to crack a crib unless I am perfectly sure there is swag enough in the safe to pay for the trouble."

"This parson is no ordinary minister, you must understand, boys, for he preaches to the nobs—nobs of the first water, and he collars a salary of ten thousand dollars a year."

Exclamations of astonishment came from the lips of both the crooks.

"Ten thousand dollars a year—why, that is two thousand pounds, my eyes and Betty Martin!" Crickton exclaimed.

"He has got a soft thing I should say!" Clever Charley declared.

The man has been one of the biggest ministers in the city for years, and is estimated to be worth over a hundred thousand dollars," Murphy declared.

"And is a man of that kind fool enough to keep valuables in his house safe?" Crickton asked, his tone showing that he was inclined to be incredulous.

"Yes, there is no doubt about that!" Murphy declared, positively. "You can depend upon it that I know what I am talking about. If I was not sure of my ground I would not ask you to go into the thing."

"Well, I know that you always used to be a careful man, and the boys always declared there was no better man in England to plan a game than Captain Murphy," Crickton remarked.

"You can depend upon it that I have not lost any of my cunning since I crossed the ocean," Murphy replied.

"You must take into consideration the fact that he is a minister, and coves in that line are seldom shrewd, acute business men."

"That's so!" Clever Charley exclaimed. "I mind me of some prison chaplains I have met, and the most of them were soft chaps that a cunning man could twist around his finger."

"My experience too with parsons is mainly confined to the duffers I have met in jails," Crickton remarked, in a reflective way. "And Clever is correct in saying they were a soft lot."

"The nature of their profession renders them less acute than men who are in the world, fighting with their fellows for a living," Murphy remarked.

"I have made a close study of this one particular minister—you see, pals, I have been working up this game for a good three months," he continued.

"Owing to peculiar circumstances I am as well-posted in regard to the minister and his household as though I lived in the mansion, and there can't anything happen in the house without the particulars of the occurrence being immediately brought to me."

"You must have your pipes laid very well then," Crickton observed.

"Oh, yes, in a game of this kind a man must be able to obtain correct information or else he can't hope to make a success out of it."

The others nodded assent.

"The minister has a lot of valuable securities stowed away in his safe, which is in a large room on the second floor which he uses as a study," Murphy explained.

"He sleeps in a back room on the same floor, but to get from his bedroom to the study it is necessary to pass through a bath-room which is between the two apartments so there is a pair of doors separating the two rooms."

"That is good," Crickton remarked, paying eager attention to the explanation.

"The situation is all right, and I fancy it will not trouble Clever and myself much to get at the contents of the safe unless it is an extra good one."

"The safe does not amount to much," Murphy replied. "It is an old-fashioned one, made to resemble a small cabinet, and cased with wood, so that no one would suspect that it was a safe unless a careful examination was made."

"Yes I have seen plenty of jim-cracks of that kind, and none of them amount to anything as a protection to valuables when regular professionals, like Clever and myself, get to work on them with the proper tools," Crickton declared with the air of a man who understood just what he was talking about.

"You can bet your life that it is an extra good strong box that we can't crack in three or four hours, and if it is just a common thing an hour will do the business!" Clever Charley asserted.

"This is a regular old fire-box, and I doubt if it will take you an hour to crack it!" Murphy remarked.

"Now as far as the contents of the safe are concerned I cannot give you an exact list of them, but there are railroad shares, and stocks and bonds in goodly number."

Both of the imported crooks shook their heads and Crickton said, slowly:

"Old pal, I don't want to say any thing reflecting upon your judgment, you know, for you ought to be able to see as far into a millstone as anybody, but you ought to be aware that securities of this kind, no matter how valuable they may be, are devilish hard things to get rid of, for they are so easily traced."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that," Murphy replied with a quiet smile.

"I am very well posted in regard to these valuable securities for I am in that line of business at present."

"Eh?" ejaculated the pals, and they stared at Murphy.

"Permit me to give you my business card," and with the word he handed the pasteboard to Crickton who read it aloud.

"Well, this beats me!" Clever Charley declared.

"You see, I was acting on your idea that it was necessary for a man in my line to have some business which he could pretend to follow in order to avert suspicion," Murphy explained.

"This Benhanan is an old acquaintance of mine whom I happened accidentally to meet."

"He is an English Jew, and does not mind how he makes money if the risk is not too great."

"Levi is an old hand in this stock exchange business, but a run of bad luck had cleaned him out when I met him, so, after he discovered that I was flush, he suggested a partnership, and I went in with him, for I thought the idea was a good one."

"To come right down to the point, we are going to work the genteel fence business, dealing in swag which the regular go-betweens cannot handle to advantage."

"To illustrate: suppose a couple of clever fellows like you two should be lucky enough to get hold of a lot of railroad shares, or bonds, or any property of that kind."

"In nine cases out of ten you can't get any ordinary fence to touch the plunder at all, for as soon as the robbery is discovered the owner gives warning, and the stuff cannot be sold, for the men who deal in such things are on the lookout."

"Now this is where Benhanan and myself calculate to get in our fine work," Murphy explained with a knowing grin.

"I am an extra good penman, you know, and by means of a little dextrous use of chemicals it will be easy for me to take out the original numbers of the bonds, or shares, and put in others; then if the hue and cry is so strong as to make the disposal of the swag a risky business on this side of the water, I can send them over the ocean to some good friends of mine who will turn them into cash, either in London, or in one of the foreign money markets on the Continent."

"Captain, I always had the opinion that you could work a big game to the queen's taste, and now I am sure of it!" Crickton declared, admiringly.

"That is so," Clever Charley coincided. "I must say that this 'ere game is a regular out and out!"

"Now to come back to our mutton, I am sure that in the minister's safe there is a good, big

swag," Murphy remarked. "The stuff which would be useless to any ordinary crackman, I can turn into money, but in addition to these securities the parson has in the safe a large sum in United States bonds which can be negotiated without any trouble, for the odds are big that old white choker hasn't kept a record of the numbers, and when they are once out of his hands it will not be possible for him to post the police so the bonds can't be sold."

"Murphy, you have a great head!" Crickton declared. "And I must say it is my opinion that this is about as soft a job as I ever heard of!"

"Oh, yes, and if we cannot make big money out of it then we ain't half the workmen that we think we are," Clever Charley asserted.

"You are willing to go in with me then?" Murphy asked.

"Indeed we are, and glad of the chance!" Crickton replied.

"Through the help of a friend I think I will be able to introduce you into the house," Murphy observed. "And give you a chance to examine the very room where the safe is."

"That would be a splendid stroke of business if it can be worked!" Crickton exclaimed.

"It will be an easy matter for my pal to tamper with the lock of the room so that a locksmith must be summoned to repair the damage."

"Ah, yes, I see, and I will be the workman," Crickton observed.

"Exactly, and you can ascertain just how the land lays."

"It is a beautiful prospect!" Clever Charley declared.

And then another "round" of ale was ordered, and so, full of glee, we leave them.

CHAPTER V.

THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

IN the parlor of a stately Madison avenue mansion sat the owner of the dwelling, Brazil Leconte, the minister whose genius rendered him one of the most famous men in the country, one of the lions of the metropolis, being reputed to receive the largest salary paid to any divine in the country.

The minister was not only a great orator, with the gift of personal magnetism which commands attention even from indifferent souls, but he was a thoroughly good man in every sense of the word.

At the moment that we introduce the popular divine to our readers' attention, his daughter entered the room.

She was a tall, masculine-looking girl, with a pleasant face, though the features were irregular, and she could not be called beautiful, but there was something about her which rendered the girl attractive in spite of her lack of beauty.

In form she was a very Amazon, being most superbly built, but, strange to say, she was far better fitted to pose as a model for a female Hercules, the god of strength, than as a Venus, the representative of a perfect woman.

To the reader who has perused the tales telling of the deeds of Joe Phenix's Specials, this man-like girl is no stranger, for she was Mignon Lawrence, who as the actress-detective, aided the veteran man-hunter so materially.

By a strange combination of circumstances it was discovered that she, the orphan actress, who had been a football of fortune about all her life, was the long-lost daughter of the great divine, whom he had mourned as dead.

Of course after this revelation was made the minister would not hear of her continuing on in her stage career, although he was a very liberal-minded man, and did not believe all the stage people were doomed to everlasting fires.

But he wanted his newly-found child to henceforth share his home, and though the girl had considerable misgivings in regard to the wisdom of the course, she yielded to his wishes.

And on this particular afternoon, when she entered the parlor, where her father sat reading one of the afternoon newspapers, she had been just one year under her father's roof.

"Father, I want to speak to you about a matter which I have had on my mind for some time," the girl said, as she took a seat by the minister's side.

"Speak freely, my child. I am ready to listen to anything that you desire to say," the father replied.

"Do you remember that after the discovery was made that I was your child, and you expressed the wish that I should make your house my future home, I told you I had doubts as to whether it would be wise for me to do so?"

"Yes, I remember, and I will confess that I also had some misgivings in regard to the matter," the minister remarked, slowly.

"You had been compelled by circumstances to lead such a life that I feared it would unfit you for a quiet home existence, but I am pleased to say that since you have been under my roof you have behaved in such a manner that I have been perfectly satisfied."

"I am glad to hear you say that!"

"You are well-behaved and lady-like, remarkably intelligent, and it would not be possible, in my opinion, for any one to surmise from either

your manner or your conversation that you had not had all the advantages that wealth and a high social station could give."

"My dear father, you must remember that the stage life which I led is about the same as a liberal education," the girl remarked.

"If the actress is not a lady, born and bred, she must do her best to make believe that she is one, and so common girls, with little education, if they are naturally smart, manage to acquire a polish which will enable them to pass muster in almost any society."

"Yes, I can understand that such a thing is very probable."

"I had no misgivings about being able to so behave in my new position that you would not have to blush for me, for I felt sure that even in so novel a situation as a minister's daughter, I could get along all right, but I was afraid I should get dreadfully tired of the life."

"You see, father, I am speaking very frankly," she continued in her peculiar, straight-forward way.

"An honest confession is good for the soul, you know."

"That is an old saying, and I believe there is a deal of truth in it."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!" Mr. Leconte asserted.

"I knew I had been used to an active life, full of excitement, and I had an idea I had grown so accustomed to such an existence that I would not be content to settle down to a quiet, uneventful life."

"I considered that it was my duty though to make the trial so long as it was your wish," she continued.

"And therefore for a year I have faithfully tried to do my best to become contented with my new life. With all my heart I have striven to be satisfied, but the effort was not successful, and I feel that I am in a false position."

"My child, I am truly sorry to hear you make this avowal, but I am glad that you came to the conclusion to tell me just how you feel about the matter, although I am grieved to learn the truth," the minister remarked, slowly.

"I am out of my sphere here, father," the girl declared in her frank way.

"I have tried to become interested in your church work, to fulfill the duties which a minister's daughter should assume, but my heart is not in the labor, and the unpleasant thought will come to me that I am acting the part of a hypocrite in pretending to take an interest in matters which really do not appeal to me at all."

"I understand your position," the minister remarked in his grave and gentle way, "and if you feel that you would be more satisfied and happier in your old way of life I will not attempt to prevent you from pursuing it."

"Of course, it seems strange to me that you should wish to exchange this comfortable home for the wandering, uncertain life of the stage-player, but I recognize the fact that humans are not all created alike; what is one man's meat is another man's poison, and the person who attempts to judge his fellows by himself will often make some sad mistakes."

"That is very true, indeed!" Mignon declared. "I must admit that stage life is congenial to me, and I feel that I would be much better satisfied if I was earning my own living in that way."

"I comprehend just how you feel about the matter; you have been used to being your own mistress, and, really, we humans are such creatures of circumstances that after we become used to certain conditions we feel very uncomfortable if we are obliged to alter our way of living."

"But as far as earning your own living goes, you must remember that I am a wealthy man and you are my only child—in fact, the only living relative I have in the world, and all I possess will one day be yours, and you must not feel as though you did not have a perfect right to be here; a right, in fact, to not only live with me but to ask freely for anything you may require."

"Oh, yes, I understand that, father, and it would only be speaking the truth for me to say that you are the most generous of parents!" Mignon declared.

"And I can freely assert that you have treated me in such a way since I have been under your roof that I have not felt the slightest hesitation in asking you for anything I required, but I am an odd fish, father, always was, and always will be I presume."

"I am entirely different from any other woman I have ever encountered."

"In fact, with my peculiarities, I think it was a great mistake that I was born a girl at all," she continued with a light laugh.

"I ought to have been a boy, for I am much more like a man than a woman. I crave a life of adventure, and a quiet, home existence, has no charms for me."

"And I do not think, father, that it is because I have been an actress that I feel as I do about this matter," she added, earnestly.

"I do not believe that fact has anything to do with it at all, for I am satisfied that I would feel just as I do now, no matter what occupation I followed."

"Very likely," Mr. Leconte asserted. "What is bred in the bone must come out, and I am not

one of those unwise fathers who think they can change the course of nature by asserting their authority."

"I am sorry to have you go away from home, but if you feel that you ought to go I will not attempt to detain you, on the contrary I will bid you God-speed!"

"You shall be as free as the bird in the air to come and go. I do not doubt from what I have seen of you that you have talent for such a life, and I will not throw any obstacles in your way, but bear in mind that this is your home, and whenever you grow tired of struggling with the world you will be heartily welcomed here."

A knock at the door and the entrance of a servant at this moment interrupted the conversation.

"There is a gentleman at the door, miss, who asked me to take this card to you," the youth announced. "He says he thinks he had the honor of meeting you some time ago, but he is not quite sure about your name, and if he has not made a mistake he would be much obliged if you would grant him an interview."

"Edgar Somerset," said Mignon, reading the name inscribed upon the card.

"Oh, yes, I remember the gentleman, he has not made any mistake. I met him in England a couple of years ago."

"Show him into the drawing-room, please, and if you will excuse me, father, I will see what he desires," she continued, after the footman departed.

"Certainly," responded the minister. Then Mignon proceeded to the drawing-room, and just after she seated herself the footman showed a gentleman into the apartment.

He was a young man of five-and-twenty or thereabouts, a gentlemanly-appearing fellow, with a decidedly English face, and from the lines of his countenance a close observer would have decided that he was a good-natured, irresolute sort of a chap.

Mignon rose to receive him, and held out her hand in a friendly manner as the gentleman advanced in a rather bashful way into the apartment, acting as though he was a little uncertain in regard to his reception, the footman discreetly retiring, after con-acting the gentleman to the door of the apartment.

The friendly greeting of Mignon immediately reassured the caller, and he advanced eagerly to grasp her hand.

"Really delighted to have the pleasure of seeing you, you know!" he exclaimed.

"I wasn't quite sure whether it was you or not," he continued.

"I happened to be strolling along down the avenue, so saw you just as you entered the house this afternoon, and as you used a latch-key, I came to the conclusion that you lived here."

"That was a natural thought; but be seated, please."

The gentleman complied with the request and Mignon also resumed her seat.

"I was a little doubtful about the matter, for I had an idea, don't you know, that it was possible I had made a mistake, being deceived by some strong resemblance."

"I understand, and I do not wonder that you felt a little uncertain. This is an elegant house, in one of the best locations in New York, and if I were a princess of the blood royal I could not be dressed any better than I am now, while the last time you saw me I was with a barn-storming burlesque party wandering through the provincial towns of England, and having extremely hard work to get from one place to another."

"Yes, that is it, exactly!" the gentleman declared, his face lighting up.

"But, I say, those were jolly days though," he continued. "Even if the 'ghost' didn't walk regularly, and our ducats were unpaid, still it was a very pleasant party, and we had no end of fun, although it was a hard matter to get money enough out of the managers to pay for a glass of ale once in a while."

"Ah, yes, we did have a royal good time, even if we did not get our salaries, but I don't wonder that you were surprised to see your old-time associate in the burlesque opera troupe walking into one of the best houses in New York with the air of being the mistress of the place."

"Oh, yes, I was, and as I did not know just how you were situated I took the precaution not to give your name to the boy," the gentleman explained.

"I wanted awfully to see you, you know, but I wasn't sure whether you would care to see any of your old acquaintances in the theatrical line, so I arranged the matter in such a way that if you did not want to see me all you had to do was to send a message that I had made a mistake, and I could retreat without compromising you at all."

"That was very thoughtful of you indeed and I am much obliged for your consideration."

"Don't mention it, I beg!"

"My position at present is, of course, vastly different from what it was when you made my acquaintance, but I am just the same kind of a woman though that I was then," Mignon

asserted. "And am just as glad to meet old friends as I ever was!"

"I am glad though that you did not mention my name for it might have given rise to gossip among the servants, and on account of my father I would prefer that they should not know I had ever been on the stage."

"This is my father's house, he is a man of large wealth, but for all that—despite the fact that he cannot do enough for me—I am an only child, and he takes pleasure in gratifying all my desires—I am not content, being anxious to resume my stage career again."

"Really now, is that a fact?" the young Englishman exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, it is. I suppose you think it is a very odd notion on my part, but you ought to know me well enough to understand that I am an odd fish, and very unlike the generality of women."

"Oh, yes, that is true. You are not a bit like any girl I ever met," Somerset remarked.

"Of course, it is natural for a fellow to have an aversion to remaining at home, but girls are usually just the other way."

"I have been living a quiet, peaceful life now for a year, and although I have not expressed a wish which my father has not hastened to gratify yet I long for the old-time stage existence."

"Ah, yes, I understand, but I fancy your governor will not like that, you know."

"Well, he would prefer I should remain at home, of course; that is only natural, but when he found out how I felt about the matter he was not disposed to throw any obstacles in the way."

"Well, now, that was very jolly of him I should say!"

"Oh, yes, my father is a reasonable man; he understands that I am old enough to take care of myself, and he does not wish to compel me to lead a life which is distasteful to me."

"Very sensible, indeed."

"So I am in the market for an engagement, and if you hear of any good position, which will suit a young lady of my talents, you must not neglect to put in a good word for me."

"I think I can get you a position right away!" the young fellow declared.

"That will be delightful!"

"I am going with a comic opera party, Morris Cohen's New York Brilliants, and I think the chances are good that we will have a long season, for the manager is an old hand at the business, and he has a moneyed man at his back with plenty of funds."

Mignon shook her head.

"Cohen may be all right, and understand what he is about," she said.

"I have heard of him before in the theatrical line, and I presume he understands how to run a show, but whenever I hear any talk about a moneyed man who is to find the funds, I always grow suspicious."

"You see, I have been out with a couple of parties where the manager had an 'angel' at his back, prepared to put up plenty of money if the troupe did not succeed in doing a good business, but after a few losing weeks the angel always spread his wings and departed, generally sneaking away in a midnight train, and leaving the actors to get out of the scrape the best way they could; so, you see, I have reason to be doubtful when a manager begins to tell me about the moneyed man who has lots of money which he had just as lief lose as not!"

"Under the circumstances I do not wonder at your incredulity, but I think this party is all right, and I will speak for you if you like."

"Do so, and if at any time I can return the favor you may command me!" Mignon declared.

"Do you really mean that now?" the young Englishman asked, earnestly.

"I certainly do! You ought to know me well enough to understand that I am not in the habit of saying things I do not mean. Candor is one of my virtues!" the girl declared with a laugh.

"Yes, I remember that you were always very outspoken, and had the reputation of never saying anything that you did not mean."

"I have always tried to be truthful, and I can assure you that I mean it when I say I am anxious to get an engagement, and if you will help me to the accomplishment of my wish I will be glad to return the favor."

"Oh, I will do all I can for you, of course, for we have always been good friends, so it will give me a great deal of pleasure to be of service to you in any way, and I am not doing it, you understand, with the idea that you are to oblige me at any future time."

"I comprehend that."

"But really, I am so situated now that I do need the kind offices of a friend," the young fellow remarked with considerable embarrassment.

"Let me be that friend!" Mignon exclaimed, immediately.

"Don't fear to speak freely," she continued. "For if I can be of service to you pray command me."

"What is it? A little shortness in the money-market, eh?" she added, roguishly.

The young Englishman colored and a sheepish look came over his face.

"You see I remember how you used to be troubled in that way," Mignon remarked.

"I know your failing; you are one of the careless fellows whose money seems to burn holes in their pockets, for you are never able to hold on to any."

"That is very true," Somerset assented with a rueful face.

"The fact is, you, see, I was born with a golden spoon in my mouth, as the saying is. My governor was a wealthy man, and as I was an only child it looked as if I would have a pretty easy time of it in my passage through the world, but this life is a very uncertain one, and the unexpected is always happening."

"I received a fine education, for the governor had set his heart on my becoming a doctor, but just after I got through college the old gentleman was beguiled into a speculation which completely ruined him. He did not have much head for business, and so fell an easy prey to a gang of sharpers, and when he awoke to the knowledge that he had been made a victim the shock was so great that he took to his bed and died."

"I was on the Continent at the time the crash came, making arrangements to enter one of the German medical colleges."

"As soon as the news of my father's sickness came I hurried back to England, but my dear old dad had gone to his long rest before I arrived, and when I came to examine the state of his affairs I found that I was absolutely penniless."

"That was certainly an unfortunate state of affairs."

"Yes, for a man who had never done a day's work in his life to be thus suddenly thrown upon his own resources, and given to understand that he must either find work or starve was decidedly unpleasant."

"And then, just as I was seriously debating whether it would not be better for me to make a hole in the water, and so settle the matter for good and all, I chanced to meet a good-natured theatrical chap who had acted as coach for a lot of us college boys when we had got up some private theatricals."

He surmised how I was situated, for he had read the particulars of the wreck of my father's fortunes and his death in the newspapers, so when he asked, in a delicate sort of way, you know, if I wasn't in Queer street, I made no bones of telling him just how matters stood with me."

"That was wise, for a practical man of the world, used to meeting emergencies, as the average actor is, generally, was about the best man in the world to give advice."

"He laughed at the idea that there would be any trouble about my getting a living, for he declared I had the making of a good actor, complimenting me by saying that I was a head and shoulders above all the rest of the boys who took part in the private theatricals, and, to make a long story short, through his influence I got an engagement, adopted a stage life, which, I suppose, I will continue to lead until the time comes for me to make my final exit."

"And now that you know my story, my dear Miss Lawrence, I suppose you can readily understand why it is so hard for me to hold on to my money," he said, in conclusion.

"Oh, yes, I comprehend; when a boy grows to manhood without having any check put upon his expenditures, it is pretty hard for him to pull up all of a sudden and be prudent."

"Indeed it is. I can testify to that effect, to my sorrow," the young Englishman declared, with a grimace.

"I arrived two days ago, and I had five pounds—about twenty-five dollars of your money, you know—when I landed, and I thought I would be able to get along on that until I got an engagement, but I met some jolly fellows on the steamer coming over, men of good family like myself, coming to this country to seek their fortune—and a couple of them, encouraged by my success, are going on the stage, by the way," he added.

"So I have spent more money than I ought to have done, and as the party I am going with don't open for two weeks, I am in considerable of a hole," Somerset continued.

"I will owe a week's board, which is seven dollars, and as I shall have to stay there another week, that will be seven more, so I will be fourteen short surely—"

"Yes, to say nothing of any spending money," Mignon remarked.

"Well, I must contrive to get on without that, somehow."

"I can let you have twenty dollars just as well as not," the girl declared, taking out her pocket-book as she spoke and extracting from it two ten dollar bills.

"Will you now, really?" Somerset exclaimed, highly delighted.

"Oh, yes, I can spare the money, and you can pay me back at your leisure. But don't forget to speak for me—to your manager."

"You can depend upon me!"

Then the young Englishman thanked her for the loan and took his departure.

"Upon my word! this is a most unexpected windfall, and takes a terrible load from my mind!" he declared, after he reached the street.

CHAPTER VI.

ARRANGING THE SCHEME.

AFTER leaving the minister's house the English actor proceeded to Broadway and walked down that thoroughfare.

At Thirty-fourth street he encountered Crickton, Clever Charley and Captain Murphy.

As the reader has no doubt conjectured the two first were the "young Englishmen of good families," whom the unsuspecting actor had met on the steamer.

Crickton immediately introduced Murphy to Somerset, and then the captain suggested that he would be much pleased to have the others join him in a social glass.

When the party were in the saloon with the English ale foaming on the counter, Crickton, who was an extremely close observer, said:

"Well, Somerset, old chap, there is quite a change in your face since morning. Then you looked decidedly blue—just as if you had lost all the friends you had in the world, while now you appear as satisfied as if you had just come in for a fortune."

"I must admit that I did feel rather blue this morning," Somerset replied.

"A little shortness in the money market, you understand?"

"Ah, yes, a thing of that sort is apt to make a man feel dull and discouraged," Clever Charley observed.

"Judging from your joyful face though you have succeeded in getting out of the difficulty," Crickton remarked.

"Yes, I have, and I can assure you, gentleman, to my great relief!" Somerset declared.

"And it was just by the luckiest accident in the world too," he asserted.

"I needed a few dollars in the worst kind of way to tide me over until I get to work," the young Englishman explained.

"So, this morning I hunted up the manager of the party I am going with and explained the situation to him, but I might just as well have spared myself the trouble for not a cent would he advance."

"He is a Jew, gentlemen, and as close-fisted as the majority of his race."

"Ah, yes, a man must have a tongue able to wheedle the devil himself to coax a cent out of one of the Chosen People, unless the fellow is actually obliged to pay," Crickton remarked.

"I was blue enough before I saw the manager, so you can judge how discouraged I felt as I walked down Madison avenue after my interview with him."

"He boards on one of the upper cross streets near Madison avenue," Somerset explained.

"Then I caught sight of a young lady whose face appeared to be familiar to me; she was just ascending the steps of an elegant house on the other side of the way, and as she entered I became certain that I had not made a mistake in thinking I had seen her before."

"She was a burlesque actress, named Mignon Lawrence, whom I had met in England."

This announcement took Murphy so completely by surprise that it was difficult for him to conceal his amazement, old and experienced schemer as he was.

"Well, well, that was certainly odd!" he declared.

"She was a jolly sort of a girl," the young actor explained. "And she and I had always been very chummy, you know, and I had a great desire to call upon her, but I was a little afraid in regard to my reception, for I could plainly see there had been a great change in her position since I met her, for then she was occupying a subordinate position, getting only three pounds a week, it was said, while now she was dressed in the most elegant fashion."

"This is a world of surprising changes!" Murphy exclaimed, with the air of an oracle.

"The name on the door was Lecount," Somerset continued. "And for a time I hesitated to call, for the thought came to me that it was possible she had married some wealthy man, and a visit from one of her old stage associates might not be agreeable to her."

The others nodded assent to this.

"Finally though I made up my mind to send in my card with a message which would not compromise her in the least, and leave her at liberty to receive me or not!"

"A very prudent movement!" Murphy remarked.

"To my surprise I was admitted immediately, and was received in the most cordial manner," the young actor continued.

"It was her father's house, and she had been off the stage for a year, but, notwithstanding the fact that she had all the luxuries that wealth could give, she was not satisfied and wanted to get back to the stage again."

"I am not surprised at that," Murphy remarked. "The average woman is inclined to be unreasonable."

"She wanted me to speak to my manager for her, and in some way, I don't know exactly how it came about, she got me to tell her just how I was situated."

"And she offered to come to your aid with a loan, eh?" Crickton suggested.

"Yes, and in the kindest possible manner, too, so I am all right now," Somerset declared.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed!" quoted Murphy.

Then they finished their ale and left the saloon.

"By the way, gentlemen, there is that little business that we have not attended to yet, and if Mr. Somerset will excuse us we had better set about it," the captain remarked.

"Ah, yes, surely!" Crickton asserted, with the air of a man suddenly reminded of something which he had forgotten.

He comprehended that Murphy wanted to get rid of the young actor.

The three went up the street, while Somerset proceeded on his way down-town.

"I think I have struck something which we can turn to our decided advantage," the captain remarked.

"It is not exactly clear to me yet how the scheme can be worked, but I do not doubt we can make something out of it. It will require considerable headwork, though, and I would suggest that we adjourn to my rooms, where we can talk the matter over at our leisure."

The others thought the idea was a good one, and as Murphy's apartments were close at hand, the three were soon comfortably seated for a conference.

"The chapter of accidents counts for a good deal in this world, and so I am never much surprised by anything that happens," Murphy began. "But I must admit that when this young actor mentioned the name of this Miss Mignon Lawrence, I was considerably amazed, for that young woman was not only connected with an unpleasant episode in my life, but her father is the man whose safe I calculate to crack."

"Well, now, really, I must say that it is rather odd," Crickton observed.

"Decidedly so!" Clever Charley exclaimed.

"And when this softy told his story of how the girl had lent him money, the thought flashed upon me that perhaps we could fix up a scheme so as to cover up our tracks in such a manner that after the safe was cracked no one would be able to get after us."

"I don't exactly see how the game can be worked," Crickton remarked, thoughtfully.

"Now, we will suppose the job is done, and the swag is in our possession," Murphy said.

"Yes, I follow you," Crickton assented.

"It would not be a difficult matter for you to get some of the stolen securities into the possession of this young actor," Murphy suggested.

"Oh, no, there would not be anything difficult about that," the cracksman replied.

"Somerset and we two occupy rooms, on the same floor, so we could easily get into his apartment and hide the securities away in his trunk, for it would be an easy matter for us to pick the lock, and no one could tell that it had been tampered with after the job was done."

"Yes, and then through my party, who is in the house, it would not be a hard matter to put the detectives on the scent," Murphy observed.

"And after the bloodhounds were once on the track the chances are great that this is the way the thing would be figured out," the Irishman continued.

"The daughter had been on the stage; this actor was an old acquaintance of hers, and it might be possible that she had planned the robbery, and Somerset had helped her to carry it out."

"I think you are right," Crickton observed, slowly. "Nine out of every ten detectives would be certain to think this was the way the scheme was worked, particularly if some of the stolen securities were found in the actor's trunk, and the game would be too, to hide them away in a clumsy manner—say under the lining of the trunk, so as to make it appear as if the owner, of the trunk was afraid it might be searched and the swag found."

"That idea is a good one, and I can arrange it so that my pal in the house can in some way reveal to the detectives that Somerset called on the girl to-day," Murphy remarked.

"And when he is brought to book, he will, of course, admit that he did call, and, probably, relate how she loaned him money, if he is pressed to tell what took place during the interview."

"This will be sure to convince the detectives that he is a confederate of the girl and helped her to get away with the plunder," the schemer continued.

"There is only one weak point," Murphy added, after thinking the matter over for a moment. "And that is, you will work the safe in such a workmanlike manner that any experienced thief-taker, will, upon examination, immediately see that the job was done by a man who thoroughly understood just what he was about."

"Yes, that is true enough," Crickton assented. "And when they come to look into Somerset's record across the water they will soon find out that he has never been identified with any job of the kind and, if the detectives are good for anything at all, they will at once come to the conclusion that it was not possible for him to have done the trick without the assistance of a professional."

"Yes, that conclusion is correct it seems to me," Murphy admitted. "And it is just what

we want to guard against, for the only object in getting the actor into the affair is to make the detectives believe that he was the man who did the job, so as to throw them on a false scent."

"Of course; I understand all about that," the cracksman responded in a slow and thoughtful way.

"Well, I think I can arrange the matter so as to crack the safe without having to use tools," he added.

"Do you think so?" Murphy asked in a doubtful tone.

"Yes, I think I can work the trick in that way," Crickton responded. "You know I am a natural born mechanic, and ever since I was a kid could handle tools with the best of them."

"Oh, yes! that is true," Murphy responded. "And I have heard good judges say that there wasn't a man in England who could handle tools with you, crooked or honest!"

"There isn't any doubt that I have a great gift in that way, and I suppose that if I hadn't taken to a crooked life I might have made my fortune out of some invention, and so have been able to take my place in the noble army of nobles; but that is neither here nor there now, and I must come back to my mutton," the cracksman remarked, contracting his brows as though the thought was an unpleasant one.

"Well, about a year ago I got an idea into my head, and in order to work it out I toggled myself up like a mechanic, and managed to get taken on as a workman in one of the biggest and best safe works in England."

"My object was to study the principles of the combination locks, and in a month I had the thing down so fine that I could open a common combination lock, simply by turning the handle around and listening to the working of the mechanism, my ears being acute enough to detect from the sound when I had struck the combination."

"Well, Blackie, you are a genius and no mistake!" the captain cried in earnest admiration.

"You are safe in betting your life on that!" Clever Charley declared.

"Yes, I wasn't born yesterday," the cracksman remarked with the air of a man who had a good opinion of himself.

"Now then, if this safe is just a common one, with an ordinary combination lock, the odds are big that I can open it without having to use tools."

"It will help our scheme along amazingly if you can," Murphy declared. "For if the safe is robbed, and there isn't any signs to show that violence has been used to get at the valuables, the inference will be clear that some one acquainted with the combination did the job."

"Of course, I don't know whether the daughter possesses the knowledge or not," the captain continued. "The chances are that she does not, to my thinking, for women seldom trouble their heads about such things, but the detectives will be pretty certain to believe that she does, and the thought will lead them astray."

"Very likely, indeed," Crickton coincided.

"The detectives act like a lot of beastly donkeys, once in a while," Clever Charley remarked. "And the best of them are apt to be so pig-headed that when they get a thought in their noddles it is the deuce and all to get it out."

"I have just thought of another idea!" Murphy exclaimed, abruptly.

"The strong point of my scheme is to fix the thing so that when the detectives come to investigate the robbery they will come to the conclusion that the daughter, and the actor, did the job."

"Exactly!" declared the cracksman, "that is the main thing."

"Now, then, we must bring matters to a head at once, for the quicker the job is done the better it will be for us," the captain remarked. "So I would suggest that we crack the safe to-morrow night."

"That will suit us all right," Crickton replied.

"There isn't anything like starting when the iron is hot. 'Precaution is the thief of time!' 'Never put off until to-morrow the work which can be done to-day!' Those are capital good sayings, you know, and if men would only live up to them they would get along a deuced sight better."

"To-morrow you must arrange it so that I can meet you in company with this Somerset, then make some excuse to depart, leaving me alone with him; I will get him to make a trip to my office, and there introduce him to my partner."

"When the detectives get on the track I will fix it so that this visit of the actor to my office will become known to them, and when they interview my partner in regard to the matter he, in the most innocent manner possible, will explain that the gentleman came to see him about selling some United States bonds which belonged to a friend of his who wished to dispose of them."

"Ah, yes, that would be mighty strong testimony against our friend, Somerset, and if the case was probed he would stand a fine chance of going to State Prison."

"Yes, but the case will not be pushed, you know, for as soon as the old gentleman finds out

that all the evidence goes to show that the robbery was committed by his daughter, and her actor friend, he will have the matter hushed up."

"Well, yes, it looks as if it ought to work that way," Crickton observed, thoughtfully.

"But here is a point you may not have considered," he added.

"The girl will protest that she is innocent, of course, and the father may be willing to take her word for it, despite the fact that the detectives have secured such weighty evidence against her, and then he will bid the bloodhounds try a new scent."

"My dear fellow, I have taken all that into consideration!" Murphy declared.

"I do not doubt that the matter may take that turn, but I am going on the belief that, no matter what the daughter, or the father, may say, none of their assertions will make any impression upon the detectives, and when they find the old gentleman is not willing they should go ahead in their own way they will throw the case up in disgust."

"Well, when you come to look at the matter in that light I think the chances are that your calculations will turn out to be correct," the cracksman observed.

"See how many points there are in favor of the detectives' striking the wrong scent and holding firmly to it," Murphy argued.

"In the first place, when the detectives come they will not be able to find any signs showing that the house has been broken into, so they will at once set it down for an 'inside robbery.' The safe will not show any marks of violence; sure proof, they will conclude, that it was opened by some one who knew the combination; then the securities found in that young actor's trunk, his talk with my partner about selling United States bonds, all point to him as the pal of the thief, and, to my mind, the chances are a million to one that after the detectives have got these clues they will not be willing to even try to secure others, for they will argue that it will only be a waste of time for them to try the experiment."

"I think you have figured the matter out about right," the cracksman remarked.

"And even if the man-hunters were willing to try, I don't see how they could possibly get on the right track," Clever Charley declared.

"You are right!" Murphy responded. "We have got the scheme worked out in a beautiful way, and there is very little doubt that it will go through all right."

"If it does I will get a little satisfaction out of the matter in addition to the plunder," he added after a moment's pause.

"How so?" Crickton inquired.

"I have a grudge against this minister's daughter," the Irishman explained. "She was married to a young Englishman who afterwards became a pal of mine, and this girl was instrumental in upsetting one of the best schemes I ever got up."

"There were three of us in it, her husband who played the decoy, a rough fellow, who did a piece of dangerous work, and myself."

"The smash-up was brought about by this girl, who disguised herself as a man—she is an actress by profession—and she played her part so well that even so keen a judge as I am had no suspicion she was anything but what she represented herself to be."

"The rough fellow was killed by the police in resisting arrest, while the husband and I were jailed. He, poor fellow, lost his head when he found himself in a prison-cell and committed suicide, leaving me alone to face the music."

"A rather unpleasant situation," the cracksman observed.

"Well, I have been in that predicament so often that, like the eel and the skinning process, I have got used to it," Murphy replied with a smile.

"I had the game so arranged that as long as the rough, who did the job, was out of the way they couldn't prove anything against me."

"If he had peached, you understand, and swore that it was I who had hired him to do the trick I might have had a deal of trouble in getting out of the scrape."

"Yes, that is true, and that is the trouble about having any business dealings with these low fellows," the cracksman declared with a weighty shake of the head.

"You cannot place any reliance upon them," he continued. "They haven't any sense of honor, and just as soon as they get the collar and find themselves in durance vile the odds are a hundred to one that they will squeal on their pals if they think they can assure their own safety by so doing."

"You are correct, but a man must use such tools once in a while," Murphy remarked.

"As I said, I got out all right and I have been on the lookout ever since to get a chance at this won an, who is more a man, by the way, than a woman."

"Now, my time has come, and, although I can't damage her much, yet for a while, I think, I will be able to render her extremely uncomfortable."

"Yes, and if the father calls the detectives in, as he will be sure to do, and they work the case

up so as to bring the robbery home to the girl, it will be bound to leak out, no matter how hard the father tries to hush the matter up."

"Yes, that is true, and so I will pay off a little of the debt I owe her!" Murphy declared, and this speech brought the conference to an end.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRACKSMEN AT WORK.

THE captain was not the kind of man to allow the grass to grow under his feet when he judged the time had come to carry out the details of a plan.

On the following afternoon the cracksmen were introduced into Mr. Lecount's house in the disguise of a locksmith, and so given an opportunity to examine the room where the safe was kept.

Like the majority of city folks who do not have to rise early in the morning the minister's household did not go to bed until late, and it was near midnight when the extinguishing of the lights showed that the inmates of the house had at last retired to rest.

Upper Madison avenue at the midnight hour is a lonesome place; few people are to be encountered; a theater party returning home, or some of the gilded youths of great Gotham, making their way, with steps more or less uncertain, toward their respective homes, and the blue-coated guardians of the night, pacing their watchful vigils.

At one o'clock there was not a soul in sight in the neighborhood of the minister's house.

Five minutes before, the patrolman had met his official superior, the roundsman, on the corner, reported that everything was quiet, and then both had gone on their ways.

This quiet, aristocratic street was of a different character altogether from its neighbors, Taird avenue on one hand, and Broadway on the other, main thoroughfares, where plenty of people could be found at all hours of the night.

Ten minutes after the two policemen disappeared in the gloom, three well-dressed men came around the corner of the cross street, proceeded to the minister's house and disappeared under the high steps which masked the entrance to the basement door.

If any chance passer-by had noticed the movements of the three, no suspicion would have been excited, for they descended to the basement with the air of men who had a perfect right to enter the house.

The three were the trans-Atlantic crooks, Captain Murphy, Blackie, the cracksmen, and Clever Charley.

Murphy had a key which unlocked the basement door.

Upon the inside were two strong bolts, but both of these were withdrawn, so that when the door was unlocked an entrance could be obtained.

"All is going to be plain sailing, you see, pals," Murphy remarked, after the three had entered the hall, and the door was closed behind them.

"It is just as I told you. It is going to be the softest kind of a snap."

"On the floor, where the safe is, only three people sleep," the Irishman continued. "The minister himself, his daughter, and the housekeeper."

"The old gentleman's room adjoins the one where the safe stands, but when he goes to bed he usually locks himself in, so there is little danger to be anticipated from him; the rooms of the two women are at the rear of the house, and the pair always lock their doors when they go to bed."

"It doesn't really seem as if there was any danger of our having trouble in getting at the swag," the cracksmen observed, producing a dark-lantern, which he lit.

The three then proceeded up-stairs; they wore rubber overshoes, so they moved with noiseless steps, and they went on through the silent house until they came to the door of the room where the safe was located.

With extreme caution Murphy turned the door-knob, but the door did not open.

"Oho! the old man took it into his head to lock this door to-night," he whispered to his companions.

"It isn't often that he turns the key, but once in a while he does."

Then he flashed the light of the lantern on the keyhole.

"The key is in the lock," he said, "so all that is needed is a pair of nippers to lay hold of the end of the key and turn it from this side."

"I have got them all right!" Crickton declared. "I am too old a cracksmen to go on an expedition of this kind without a good assortment of necessary tools."

"Oh, the nippers will do the business as far as the key is concerned, but there is a bolt on the door, and if the old duffer has seen fit to bolt the door, what then?"

"I don't believe any little twopenny bolt will bother an old hand like myself much," Crickton replied.

"I have a bit and brace, in sections, which I can put together in a jiffy," he continued. "Then after I bore a hole through the door it

will be an easy matter with a bit of wire to pull back the bolt."

"You have the wire too, I suppose?" Murphy questioned.

"Didn't I say that I never started in on a job like this without my tools?" the cracksmen remarked.

"Ah, yes, you are a master-hand at this sort of thing, and no mistake!" Murphy observed.

"But I am not going to put you to the trouble of boring a hole through the door," he continued. "That would leave a mark which would be proof positive to any experienced detective that professional cracksmen had had a hand in the job, and that is just what we must avoid. I knew the bolt was on the door and anticipated that the old gentlemen might lock the door and shoot the bolt home when he got ready to go to bed."

"I was aware we could manage the key all right from the outside, but the bolt would trouble us, as it was imperative that we must not leave any traces which would go to show that professionals had been at work," Murphy continued.

"So, in order to fix the bolt business all right, I got my pal, who is in the house, to remove the screws of the bolt catch and put smaller ones in their places."

"Ah, yes, I see, and that is a jolly good trick I must say," Crickton remarked, approvingly.

"The bolt looks all right, of course, but when a strong pressure is brought to bear on the door the catch will give way, and we can walk in without any trouble."

"Then after we are in I will put the original screws of the bolt back again, so when an examination is made no one will be able to detect that anything is wrong."

"Of course we cannot put the bolt back in the catch again after we get through, but the chances are a thousand to one that the minister will not notice that the door is not bolted when he unlocks it in the morning, and if he should happen to have his attention called to the fact he will be apt to believe that he neglected to push the bolt when he locked the door."

"Oh, yes, that is very likely, for it is hard work for a man to be certain about such a thing," the cracksmen observed.

Then he produced a pair of strong pincers—the "nippers" of the house-breaker—grasped the end of the key with them and so unlocked the door without any trouble.

After this was done, Murphy turned the knob, and then, putting his shoulder to the door, pressed steadily against it.

The door yielded to the pressure and swung open. Into the room stole the crooks, and as soon as they were fairly in the apartment, Murphy said:

"Now, Blackie, while you are trying your luck on the safe I will fix the bolt catch."

"All right, my tulip!" replied the cracksmen in the same cautious tone.

Then he and Clever Charley went to the safe while Murphy drew a screw-driver from his pocket and proceeded to put the catch of the bolt in order.

It only took him a few minutes to complete this task, and then he joined the others at the safe.

Crickton was moving the knob of the combination, and with his ear closely pressed to the safe, listened to the workings of the mechanism of the lock.

For fully five minutes he continued patiently at his task, and then, with an exclamation of satisfaction, exclaimed:

"I've got it all right! I told you the odds were big that I could do the trick!"

And as he spoke he swung the door of the safe open.

A chuckle of delight came from the other two. Quickly these experienced workmen despoiled the safe of its contents.

There were a number of valuable papers, railroad shares and bonds, documents which could not be easily turned into cash by any one but the owner.

"Here are fifteen thousand dollars' worth of United States bonds. That is five thousand apiece for us."

"A tidy bit of swag!" Crickton declared.

"About as good a thing as we have struck for a dog's age!" Clever Charley affirmed.

"In regard to the rest of this stuff, it is a question in my mind if it will be worth while for us to bother with it," Murphy remarked.

"The only way we could get any money out of it, would be by getting some clever 'scratcher' to alter the numbers, and then the certificates would have to be sent across the water to turn them into cash, and there would be so much risk and bother about the thing, that I am doubtful if it would pay us to go to all the trouble."

"I do not believe it would," Crickton replied. "My motto is to always let well enough alone. We have collared a tidy swag with very little trouble, and no risk to speak of, so I propose we cut our lucky with the bonds, and let the rest of the stuff alone."

"That is my idea, too," Clever Charley coincided. "We can toddle off with the bonds, and do not stand one chance in a thousand of being

nabbed, but if we try to do anything with the shares, the odds are big that we will find ourselves in a hole the first thing we know."

"You are right, old pals," Murphy assented. "The risk is great, and as long as we have made a good haul, we ought to be satisfied."

"That is my idea," the cracksmen declared.

"Mine, too," Clever Charley affirmed.

"We must take a half a dozen of the bonds along, though, for the benefit of our friend, the actor, so we can put up the little job on him," Murphy remarked.

And as he spoke he took six of the railway certificates and put them in his pocket.

"Now I propose that we divide these bonds right away, so that each of us will have his share," Murphy continued.

"I think that is a good idea," the cracksmen assented. "Then if we should happen to run into any trouble, each man can look after his own."

"It is a jolly good notion!" Clever Charley declared.

Then Murphy divided the bonds so that each man had five thousand dollars' worth.

"Now close the safe again and we will be off," the Irishman exclaimed.

A long breath coming from behind them startled the crooks.

The Combination turned in alarm, and the rays of the dark lantern, held in the cracksmen's hand, fell full on the figure of the minister.

The old gentleman was in his dressing gown and slippers, and as he held a pen in his hand it was apparent that instead of being in bed, and asleep, as the intruders supposed, he had been writing in his room.

"Misguided men, what are you doing?" the minister exclaimed, his face very red, and trembling in every limb from excitement.

With wonderful quickness the cracksmen whipped out a knife and raising it in a threatening way cried in a low but resolute tone:

"Don't attempt to give an alarm for if you do it will cost you your life!"

The old gentleman started back, threw up his hands as though to ward off a blow, then tottered, and, with a low moan, fell forward. Murphy sprung toward him, caught the old gentleman in his arms, so as to break the force of the fall, and then laid him gently on the floor.

"Pals, this is going to be a bad piece of business, I am afraid!" the captain exclaimed in an earnest tone.

"What is the matter with the man? So help me Bob! I never touched him!" the cracksmen declared. "All I did was to threaten a bit with the toad-sticker so as to keep him from giving an alarm."

"Yes, I know that, but the sight of the knife, and your threat, gave him a shock," Murphy replied, and as he spoke he was engaged in examining the condition of the fallen man.

"It looks a little as if he was subject to heart trouble," he continued, "and many a man affected in that way has been killed by a lighter shock than this."

"It would be ugly if the old duffer has kicked the bucket!" Clever Charley observed.

"His heart has stopped beating!" the Irishman announced in a deep half suppressed tone.

"Is that so?" Crickton inquired, anxiously.

"Yes, he is a dead man, I think, beyond a doubt!" Murphy declared.

"We must get out then as soon as possible!" the cracksmen announced.

"Oh, yes, we want to spread our wings and fly as soon as we can," Clever Charley added.

"If we should happen to be nabbed here in the room with the dead man we would have mighty hard work to prove that we did not kill him, for the beaks would be sure to think we did the job," he continued.

"Yes, there isn't any doubt that we would be accused of murdering him, and as you say, we might have hard work to prove we didn't do it, although a medical examination would make manifest the fact that he died from natural causes, but it would cost us a deal of money to get out of the scrape."

"Let us be off then!" the cracksmen suggested.

"We have got the swag all right, and if we can succeed in getting away with it we can consider that we have pulled off a mighty successful trick. I will close the safe again. And he did so."

"Oh, yes, there isn't any mistake about that, and though this is a rather awkward, and unexpected incident, yet it will not trouble us much if we are able to get off without detection."

"We must try our best to do the trick up brown!" the cracksmen declared.

And then the three departed.

After leaving the room Crickton was careful to lock the door from the outside with the nippers, so that no one would have a suspicion that strangers had been in the apartment.

With noiseless steps the three stole down the stairs and made their exit by the basement door, Murphy taking the precaution to be sure the door was locked after they had passed through it.

It was a spring lock, so there was no key on the inside, and the simple closing of the door sprung the lock.

In the shadow of the steps, which shielded the

basement entrance, the three halted and listened intently before proceeding to the street.

So still was the night that the footsteps of a solitary man, a half a block away, could be heard.

The crooks waited until the sound of the footfalls died away, listening intently to be sure there was no one else approaching.

Not a sound could they hear, and so they stole like so many phantoms, with noiseless feet, to the street, moved cautiously along until they came to the corner of the cross street into which they turned, and then they marched on with upright heads as though three more honest men could not be found in the metropolis.

After they had got a couple of blocks away from the house, Murphy spoke:

"I have been thinking, pals, how this thing is going to turn out," he said in a meditative way.

"If the old man is not dead, only in a swoon, it will make it a bad business, for he will be able to give a description of us, and so we will have to lay low, but it is my idea that the minister will never speak again, and if that supposition is correct we are all right. So, in order to know just how the cat jumps, I will put on a disguise and go there to-morrow morning."

The others thought this idea an excellent one.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAWYERS.

On the morning which followed the night on which occurred the events described in our last chapter, two gentlemen sat at breakfast in the restaurant of one of the most noted New York clubs.

The clock upon the wall showed that it lacked a few minutes of eight, and as the frequenters of this particular club were not noted for their early rising, the only occupants of the apartment were the two gentlemen, for even the waiters had withdrawn to enjoy a social confab.

As the pair are destined to play a prominent part in our story we will describe them.

The elder was a man of thirty-five, of rather large build, with a full face, adorned with curly blonde hair, cut short, and mutton-chop whiskers, in the English style, of the same hue.

A jolly, good-natured sort of fellow, just the kind of man who would be picked out to make a capital after-dinner speech.

He was called Horace Kaynoll.

His companion was a man of an altogether different type, being spare in body, and thin in face, sharp features, with fine black hair, plastered over an abnormally high forehead.

He was a smooth, oily sort of man, who bears upon his outward person the semblance of eminent respectability.

No man in his senses would ever have made the mistake of asking him to buy a ticket to any place of popular amusement, but the industrious solicitor for a church fair would have at the first glance set him down as a man likely to take an interest, even if he did not contribute largely.

He answered to the name of Thomas Jefferson Wirewax.

The pair composed the law firm of Kaynoll and Wirewax, well and favorably known in New York.

The young men had succeeded their fathers who had also been lawyers and partners.

While the sires lived the sons had been their assistants, and on their death succeeded to the business.

The firm were in the real estate line, having a large and lucrative clientage, and seldom appeared in a court room.

Wirewax had just returned from a Western trip and, by appointment, met his partner at the club.

As we have said, the reputation of the firm was extra good, and it was commonly believed they were doing a very safe and lucrative business.

This was a fact when the practice had been in the hands of the fathers of the pair, a couple of prudent men who early in life made the resolution that they would always live within their income, but the moderate profits did not satisfy the young men after they got the business in their own hands, so they branched out and went to speculating in real estate, anxious to make as much in one year as their sires had been content to take in ten.

The usual result followed; the pair soon found they had undertaken to play too big a game, and although both had been left a goodly amount of money by their cautious, hard-working parents, yet the cash was speedily swallowed up, and now at the time of which we write the pair were at their wits' end to know how to raise money to meet certain obligations which would soon come due.

The pair had been induced to invest money in lots in a certain Western city, which was enjoying a "boom," and Wirewax, when the funds of the firm began to run low, took a trip out West in hopes to realize some cash, and now he had come to give his partner a report of his mission, having telegraphed him that he was on his way home and requesting him to be at the club.

Not a word was said about business until the breakfast was on the table and the waiter had departed.

"I haven't heard anything from you since you have been gone," Kaynoll observed. "And although the old saying declares that no news is good news, yet in this case I am very doubtful as to whether it will hold good or not."

"You are quite right—things are very bad," Wirewax replied, with a doleful shake of the head.

"Didn't make a raise?"

"Not a dollar!"

"Well, that is bad indeed!"

"Awful! Why, my dear fellow, the bottom has entirely dropped out of that town!" Wirewax declared, in a very melancholy way.

"I don't believe we could find anybody who would be willing to take the lots off our hands and assume the mortgage."

"We got in too late, eh?"

"Yes, the boom died away just after we bought and we are stuck in the worst kind of a way."

"Too bad—too bad!" Kaynoll exclaimed.

"We are in a terrible tight place too."

"I comprehend. We must raise some money, but for the life of me I don't see how we are going to do it."

Within a couple of weeks we have got to have about ten thousand dollars, or an exposure will come of our financial condition which will surely drive us to the wall," Kaynoll declared.

"I have got to the end of my rope," Wirewax observed. "And I don't believe I could raise a hundred dollars more to save my life."

"Well, I am in about the same condition. I have 'touched' all my friends as heavily as I dared. Men in our position, skating along on very thin ice, must be careful of every move if they are anxious not to break through and go down."

"We are in a very bad way, just now, and if the world at large had any suspicion of just how we stand, we would be ruined men inside of four and twenty hours, for all our creditors would come down on us, and we couldn't pay ten cents on a dollar."

"If we had only been content to let well enough alone, and not have gone into these unlucky speculations," groaned Wirewax.

The two had made a pretense of eating during the conversation but neither one had any appetite.

"Well, well, there isn't any use of crying over spilled milk," Kaynoll rejoined.

"The mischief has been done. We are in a hole, and it will not do us any good to repine because we were not wise enough to keep out of it," he continued.

"Oh, yes, that is true enough. What we must do now is to bend all our energies to devise some way to retrieve our desperate fortunes," Wirewax remarked.

"During your absence I have been trying to work a little scheme. You know that at various times we have attended to little matters for Mr. Lecount."

"The minister—oh, yes."

"Lecount is a man who is pretty well off—a hundred thousand or somewhere in that neighborhood, I imagine."

"Yes, I should think so."

"The day after you left we sent word for me to call, and when I arrived I found he wished me to draw out his will. He was not feeling very well, he said; his doctor had advised him that he had an affection of the heart, and although he might live for years, if he took proper care of himself, yet a sudden and violent shock at any time would be liable to prove fatal."

"Ah, yes, and under the circumstances it was wise for him to put his house in order," Wirewax observed.

"Exactly what I told him."

"In the midst of life we are in death, and no one knows how soon the dread hand of the Dark Angel will be raised to strike us down," the sorrow-faced young man remarked, with the air of a deacon.

He had always been a very sober-minded young man, and much given to speeches of this sort, which gave the world the impression that he was extra reliable and trustworthy.

"The only living relative that Mr. Lecount has is his daughter."

"Yes, I have met her, but she does not resemble the father much, and from the little conversation I had with her I got the idea that she did not take much interest in religious matters."

"That is usually the case with minister's children, you know—or, at any rate, that is the popular impression."

"From my limited experience I should think it was tolerably correct."

"She is very quiet and lady-like, and though she is not a handsome girl—that is, no one would be apt to call her beautiful, yet she is stylish and has an attractive way with her."

"Yes, she is rather dashy, and extremely self-possessed," Wirewax remarked.

"In fact," he continued, "I don't think I ever met a girl of her years who seem so capable of taking care of herself."

"She has been educated abroad, I should judge, for she knows all about England and the countries on the Continent, and having traveled extensively accounts for her self-reliance."

"Yes, of course."

"I drew out the will," Kaynoll explained. "And with the exception of some few small bequests, all his property is left to his daughter."

"Unconditionally?" asked the other in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes, not a condition attached—not one,"

Kaynoll replied.

"At Mr. Lecount's death all his fortune comes to her and she is free to do with it as she likes."

"A large sum of money to intrust to the care of a young woman," Wirewax observed with a doubtful shake of the head.

"And it seems to me that it was not prudent for Mr. Lecount to make a will of that sort."

"I suggested that to him—in a delicate manner, of course," Kaynoll declared. "But I found the old gentleman was quite free from any fears in regard to the matter. 'If I had a million to leave I should not hesitate to intrust it to my daughter, for she is amply able to take care of it,' he replied."

"Brimful of confidence, eh?"

"Oh, yes. Of course, after such a remark as that I did not attempt to interpose any more objections."

"Certainly not!"

"But when he came to specify his possessions and I discovered that he had fifteen thousand dollars in Government bonds in his safe, I ventured to suggest to him that it was very unwise to keep so much money—just the same as cash—in the house."

"You don't mean to say that he was foolish enough to keep the bonds in his mansion?" Wirewax exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, he had the bonds in a safe in his study," Kaynoll replied.

"I know this to be a fact for he opened the safe and showed them to me."

"Oh, my goodness! what imprudence!" the other declared.

"Really now, you know, a direct invitation to some rascals to break in and rob him, you know!" Wirewax continued.

"Yes, I represented to him that he was running a great risk, but he is a careless, unbusiness-like man, as gentlemen of his cloth usually are, and my warning did not seem to make much impression on him. He was not afraid of being robbed, he said, for with the exception of his daughter no one knew the bonds were in the safe."

"Ah, yes, that is the way they always talk, you know!" Wirewax declared with an air of deep disgust.

"I never knew a man yet who kept money in the house who wasn't sure that only one or two, whom he could implicitly trust, knew anything about the matter," he continued. "They never take into consideration the fact that servants are always prying and eavesdropping, and an uncautious expression, let fall by some one who knows that the money is in the house will put somebody else in possession of the secret."

"I explained this to Mr. Lecount, but my words did not make much impression on him, for he is one of the easy-going kind of men who are so slow to suspect evil in others," Kaynoll explained. "Then I started on a fresh tack and told him that in my opinion it was not wise in him to have so large an amount of money invested in Government bonds, paying only a low rate of interest, when it was possible to put the money out to so much better advantage."

"That statement ought to have made some impression!" Wirewax exclaimed.

"It did, and then I further said that in the event of his death it would be so much better to have the fifteen thousand securely invested in a good six per cent mortgage, for the bonds would only be a trouble and an annoyance to his daughter."

"Correct! quite correct!"

"He was impressed with the soundness of the reasoning, and I am to see him to-day to settle the matter."

"You have an investment in view ready to submit to him?"

"Yes, a second mortgage on that New Jersey land of ours," Kaynoll replied with a grin.

"Of course, in the present depressed state of affairs in that region, the land wouldn't sell for enough to cover the first mortgage, but in time it will undoubtedly be valuable, and as long as we pay the interest promptly everything will be all right, for the old gentleman has perfect faith in us and will not be likely to have an examination made when we say the investment is a good one."

"My dear Horace, this is really a stroke of genius!" Wirewax exclaimed, very much elated. "In all my experience I have never heard of anything better. Really, my dear fellow, you are developing into a perfect Napoleon of finance!"

"If I can get the old gentleman to make the investment, and I do not think there is a doubt but what I can succeed, it will prove our salvation!" Kaynoll declared.

"The fifteen thousand dollars will put us right on our legs again."

"Oh, yes, and if we get over this crisis we are pretty certain to pull through."

"And now I have another little scheme which I have worked out during your absence," Kaynoll remarked, with a self-satisfied smile.

"Explain! I am all attention."

"The idea came to me when I was drawing out the old gentleman's will."

As soon as I made the discovery that everything Mr. Lecount had was to be left to his daughter, and she was not to be bound down by any restrictions, I let drop a sly remark that the majority of fathers would not think it advisable to leave so large a property untrammelled by conditions to a young girl for fear that she might not be able to look after it; they would be apprehensive that she might fall the prey of some fortune-hunter."

"Ah yes, yes, that was well put."

He replied that he had perfect faith in his girl; she had been accustomed to looking out for herself while abroad, and as for being entrapped into a marriage with an unworthy man, he did not think there was any danger of such an event happening, for she was not the kind of woman to yield to a romantic fancy, and, really, she did not seem to care for beaux."

"That is true enough; she does not, apparently, care to attract the young men at all."

"She certainly does not appear to," Kaynoll observed. "Most girls of her age are anxious to attract the attention of the young men, and are never so happy as when they have a half a dozen young fellows dangling at their heels, but Miss Lecount appears to have no desire to figure as a belle."

"She is decidedly a very strange girl," Wirewax observed.

"As I told you, an idea came to me, and that idea was to lay siege to Miss Lecount. She is one of the solid kind of girls, you know, and that, I suppose, is the reason why the young men of the set to which she has been introduced have not made any impression upon her; for nearly all of them are light, frivolous fellows."

"Now, I am a sober, substantial business man, and though I am not particularly anxious to enter the married state yet, the prospect of getting a whack at a hundred thousand dollars might induce me to put my head in the nuptial noose."

"The idea is a good one, but I am afraid you will find the lady a rather hard subject to make an impression upon, particularly if she knows she is to come in for so much money."

"Ah, but she doesn't know that. Mr. Lecount said that it was not his intention to speak about the matter, and desired me to keep silence."

"Naturally, as a professional man, you would. Well, my dear fellow, it will do no harm for you to try for the heiress, and now, I believe I can finish my breakfast with a relish," Wirewax declared, applying himself to the viands.

CHAPTER IX.

A SURPRISE.

"I do not doubt that this revelation has taken a great weight from your mind," Kaynoll remarked, as he proceeded to dispose of the rest of his breakfast.

"I know that I was on the verge of despair when this chance came, and I grasped it as a drowning man would clutch at a rope thrown to save him."

"Of course; and really, my dear fellow, if we succeed in pulling through all right it will be almost a miracle."

"I am going to try hard to make all my points," Kaynoll asserted.

"The first one—the getting hold of the fifteen thousand dollars—I do not think I will have any trouble about. The old gentleman was to give me an answer to-day, and I am satisfied he will empower me to transfer the bonds to a mortgage."

"It will save us if he does."

"I am not borrowing any trouble about that, for I do not think there is a doubt that the scheme will go through all right, and in regard to securing the girl I am prepared to play a deep game."

"It is always well to have a friend at court, you know, and so I have secured the butler, Joel. He is an Englishman, and used to tips, so for some time I have made a practice of feeding him liberally whenever he had occasion to do anything for me, and after I made up my mind to enter the race for the girl I took occasion to tell him that I was very much interested in her, and if anything came to his knowledge which would likely be of service to me I would be glad to pay liberally for the information."

"That was wise."

"Yes, I think so. The family butler is a man of importance, you know, and a valuable ally for a fellow situated as I am to have on his side."

"Talk of the Old Boy and he appears!" exclaimed Wirewax at this point.

"Eb, what do you mean?"

"Here comes the butler now!"

The speaker had caught sight of the man through the glass door.

Into the room came the sleek, fat, middle-aged

Englishman, whose character was apparent at a glance.

The lawyers could see from his looks that he was greatly agitated, and as the waiter pointed out to him where the couple were seated it was plain he was in search of one of the two.

"Oh, Mr. Kaynoll, such an 'orrible 'appenin'!" the Englishman exclaimed, as he came up to the table, taking strange liberties with his h's after the fashion of his kind.

"What is the matter?" the lawyer inquired.

"I went to your 'ouse, sir, when Miss Lecount sent me for a doctor, for I thought you ought to know all about it, and at your rooms they sent me 'ere!" the man declared, almost out of breath from the haste with which he had come.

"That was correct," Kaynoll declared.

"As I said, sir, Miss Lecount sent me for a doctor, but I thought you ought to be sent for too, and I could get the doctor on my way back."

"Exactly! it can be arranged that way without any trouble, but what has happened?" Kaynoll asked.

"Mr. Lecount, sir, is dead!" exclaimed the man in a solemn tone.

"Dead!" cried the lawyers in a breath.

"Yes, sir, found dead in his study this morning."

"This is a most astounding piece of news!" cried Kaynoll, very much disturbed by the unexpected and unwelcome intelligence.

"It is true, sir, worse luck!" responded the Englishman with a melancholy shake of the head, and then he proceeded to relate the particulars, which, to save time, we will condense.

Mr. Lecount was very regular in his habits and was accustomed to taking breakfast at half past eight.

Finding that he did not make his appearance at his usual hour, his daughter went to call him.

No answer being given to her knocks on his bedroom door, nor to her calls, she had the servants summoned and instructed the butler to break in the door.

When entrance was gained to the apartment, it was found that the bed had not been occupied; from the bedroom the searchers went to the study and there, cold in death, upon the floor, they found the minister.

As the butler explained Miss Lecount bore up under the shock like a hero.

After ascertaining that her father really had expired she gave orders to the others that nothing in the apartment was to be touched, and all were to retire by way of the bedroom to the entry and remain without until a doctor and the police could be notified.

The police would send for the coroner she explained.

So the butler volunteered to go for the doctor, while the footman hurried to the police station.

"I am very much obliged indeed, Joel, for your prompt action in notifying me," said Kaynoll, rising and seizing his hat, an example followed by his companion.

Then he slipped a dollar into the hand of the Englishman.

"As Mr. Lecount's legal advisers it is important that we should be present at the examination."

And then all three hurried away, eager to reach the house, wherein lay the dead body of the old minister, as soon as possible.

The pair were decidedly uneasy in their minds.

CHAPTER X.

THE EXAMINATION.

"Let me see, Doctor Cheesboro is Mr. Lecount's physician, I believe," Kaynoll observed as the three hurried onward.

"Yes, sir, he is," the butler replied.

"And his house is right on our way," Wirewax remarked.

"Just baround the corner from the avenue; we pass right by it," Joel suggested.

A few minutes' walk brought them to the doctor's abode, and as they reached the mansion the physician, a fine, portly, well-preserved, middle-aged gentleman, made his appearance.

Briefly Mr. Kaynoll acquainted him with the particulars of the minister's death.

"I am not surprised, for I warned him some time ago that his heart was affected and he must take good care of himself," the doctor remarked, as he joined the others in their progress toward the house of the dead man.

On the steps of Mr. Lecount's house, they encountered the officer in charge of the precinct, Captain Ben Constantine, a bluff and burly man, one of the oldest captains on the force, but not regarded as being particularly capable, for he was inclined to be dogmatic and headstrong, one of the kind of men who would quickly jump to a conclusion and then stick to it, notwithstanding the fact that his conclusion was not warranted by the circumstances.

With the captain was his favorite ward detective, Mike McGarragh by name, a blundering Irishman, who made so many mistakes that it was a wonder how he managed to keep his place on the force; and if he had not been a

relative of one of the local political leaders, who possessed great influence, there is no doubt that McGarragh would have been reduced to the ranks long before.

All the gentlemen were acquainted, so there wasn't any need of introductions.

"This is a bad business, doctor," the police captain remarked in his pompous way as the others came up.

"Yes, but it was not unexpected," the physician replied. "As I just told these gentlemen, Mr. Lecount had heart disease, and I warned him some time ago that he must take great care of himself."

"Yes, yes, of course, but men never pay any attention to cautions of that kind," the captain declared.

Then they all entered the house, and were received by Miss Lecount.

Mignon was pale, but composed; she was not one of the crying kind, and although deeply affected by the death of the father, whom she had known for so brief a time, but who had done all in his power to make her happy, yet the deep grief she felt was not apparent.

The burly police captain's suspicions were at once excited by the composure of the girl.

"Doesn't seem to take the affliction much to heart, eh, Mike?" he whispered in the ear of the detective.

"Bedad, she does not!" the Irishman answered, with a knowing shake of the head.

"Looks suspicious, eh?"

"Shure an' it does, captain, dear," replied the other, who always made it a point to agree with his official superior.

Mignon told the story of the discovery of the death, and explained how she had taken precautions so that nothing should be disturbed.

"Your forethought is to be commended," the doctor remarked.

The physician had taken quite a liking to the girl, as she was so quiet, lady-like and intelligent, quite a contrast to the usual giddy, frivolous society girl.

"But I fancy the case is a perfectly plain one," the doctor continued. "For I warned your father a short time ago that he must look out for his health, and avoid exposing himself to any sudden excitement."

"I do not think that anything out of the way occurred last night," Mignon responded. "Not to my knowledge certainly, and I would surely have known of it if aught had happened."

"I was home all the evening and sat with father in his study until about eleven o'clock, then he said he thought he would put the finishing touches on his sermon for next Sunday, and would shut himself up in his bedroom until he completed it."

"He had a desk there," she explained, "and it was his belief that he could write better there during the quiet midnight hours than elsewhere, and it was a common custom for him to shut himself up in that manner."

"I went to bed, and I presume my father took his place at his desk, as he proposed."

"How long he wrote I do not know, but the shock came before he retired to rest, for the bed shows that he did not lie down, and he was fully dressed."

"I think we had better proceed to an inspection of the premises," the police captain remarked, with the air of one who intended that his words should have weight.

"Certainly, this way, please," Mignon said, and, as she directed them to ascend the stairs with that quick instinct which had made her so valuable a police spy she comprehended that the burly police captain had an idea there was something wrong about her father's death.

"It cannot be possible that he can suspect my father came to his end by foul means, and that I had a hand in the matter?" she murmured, as she followed the gentlemen up the broad staircase.

"In the entry above she took the lead and conducted the gentlemen into the minister's bedroom, but before entering she paused on the threshold and directed their attention to the door which led into the study."

"Through that door entrance can be gained to the room where my father was found," she said. "It is locked on the inside, as was also this door which I had the servants break open."

Then through the bedroom the party proceeded to the study.

"All here is exactly as it was when the discovery was made with the exception that I had my father's body removed from the floor, where it was lying, in the center of the room, to the lounge."

"It would have been better if you had not touched the body," the police captain said in his gruff way, anxious to display his authority.

"It was repugnant to me to allow the body to remain in that condition, and I am unable to see what possible difference it can make," Mignon replied in a cold, peculiar tone, which decidedly annoyed the police captain.

"Well, miss, I don't know as it does make any difference in this case, but it is always better not to allow anything to be disturbed in the case of a sudden and mysterious death," the captain remarked.

Then while the doctor made an examination

of the body, the police captain and the detective inspected the room.

There were only two ways by which entrance could be gained, through the bedroom and by the door which led into the entry.

This door was locked, and the evidence plainly showed that the other was securely fastened also, for there were the marks where entrance had been secured by force.

It did not take the able physician long to come to a conclusion.

"I do not think there is any doubt whatever in regard to the cause of death," he said. "It is heart trouble, just as I predicted."

"But there will have to be a coroner's inquest!" Captain Constantine declared.

"Certainly, of course, the law requires that," the doctor assented.

"I have summoned the coroner and he is likely to arrive at any moment," the officer remarked.

"I would suggest that the body be removed to the drawing-room down-stairs," the doctor advised.

"That will be a more suitable apartment for the inquest than this," the physician continued.

"This, of course, my dear Miss Lecount, is a mere matter of form," he explained to the girl.

"There isn't any doubt in regard to your father's death, but the law requires certain formalities."

"Yes, I comprehend," Mignon replied.

"Miss Lecount, excuse me for bringing business matters to your attention at this moment of grief," Kaynoll remarked in his most respectful manner at this point.

"But as your father's legal adviser I feel that I ought to speak," he continued.

"Yonder safe contains valuable papers, also a large sum in Government bonds, and your father's will, which I had the honor of drawing out for him only about a week ago, and I really think the contents of the safe should be examined, a list of them taken, and then they be removed to a safer place, for in my judgment it is not wise to allow them to remain here."

"I cautioned your father in regard to the matter at the time when I drew out the will, when he confided to me the particulars in regard to the contents of the safe, but he, like the majority of ministers, was very careless in regard to business matters, and did not seem to attach much importance to my words."

"I have no objection," Mignon replied. "If you think it best, proceed as you suggest."

"Do you know the combination of the safe, miss?" the police captain asked, after he had tried to open it and found it locked.

"No, sir, I do not," the girl replied.

"Well, that is rather odd that your father never confided the combination to you," the captain suggested, and there was a certain something in the speech which revealed to the quick-witted girl that the official regarded her with suspicion.

"I took no interest in the matter, never having occasion to use the safe in any way," Mignon replied quietly, but to herself she said:

"You thick-headed brute! what foolish notion have you got in your dull brain?"

"We can dispatch a messenger to the safe company and they will send an expert who will make short work of the job," Kaynoll suggested.

"Very good idea indeed!" the police captain declared. "Suppose you go, Mike?"

The detective assented, and started at once on his mission.

"I will attend to having the body removed," the doctor remarked.

Mignon thanked the friendly physician and retired to summon the servants to aid him.

Under the doctor's orders the room below was soon put in readiness, and then the body was removed to it, and all needful preparations made for the arrival of the coroner.

The two lawyers and the police captain remained in the upper apartment, taking seats to await the arrival of the safe expert, the official assuming an air of owl-like gravity, which he considered proper under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XI.

A MODERN DOGBERRY.

AFTER taking a seat, Captain Constantine produced a memorandum-book and pencil, then proceeded to make some notes, with the air of a man upon whose shoulders the weight of an empire rested.

Having nothing better to do the lawyers watched the captain, curious to know what he was up to.

Then, without a word of warning, the captain rose abruptly, stole on tip-toes to the door, which had been unlocked to allow the body to be removed, opened it with extreme caution, and peered out into the entry.

Then he passed through the door, and closed it after him in the most mysterious manner.

"Well, upon my word!" Wirewax declared in astonishment. "Did you see that?"

"Yes, and now will you tell me what the deuce he is after?" Kaynoll inquired.

"You are too much for me. I will be hanged if I can tell!"

Hardly had the words left his lips when the police captain stole into the apartment again,

coming from the bedroom, and he was careful to close the door behind him in the most cautious manner.

The lawyers looked the surprise which they felt at this maneuver.

"Hist!" said the police captain, placing his fore-finger upon his mouth as though to impose caution.

The lawyers looked at the official and then at each other in wonder.

"It is all right," said the captain, stealing across the room to his seat, which he resumed.

"Eh? What is all right?" asked Kaynoll, at a loss to know what to make of the man's actions.

"There isn't anybody in the entry," the captain remarked in a low and cautious tone.

"Who the deuce said their was?" Kaynoll asked, completely mystified.

"But it was likely, you know, that under the circumstances, there should be," the official remarked, still in the same cautious tone.

"Really now, I don't see that!" Kaynoll exclaimed. "They have all gone down-stairs excepting us three."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that, but I am not easily fooled, you know; I am an old bird and one not easily caught, for I am up to snuff, and you can bet your life on it too!" Then the officer nodded his head and grinned in a knowing way at the pair, who stared in surprise.

"Well, captain, I suppose you know what you mean but I am blessed if I do!" Kaynoll declared.

"Neither do I," Wirewax asserted. "Suppose you explain, captain, and tell us what you mean by this mysterious performance, and still more mysterious words."

"Don't you twig?" the official asked, surprised. "Why, I expect to catch somebody sneaking in the entry—put up to play the spy upon us!"

Kaynoll took a good look at the captain with the idea of ascertaining whether he had been drinking or not, for this idea seemed so ridiculous that it did not seem possible to him that a man could entertain such a notion if his brains were not muddled by liquor.

The officer was known to be a hard drinker, but as he was a man who could stand a deal of liquor his love for the ardent had never gotten him into trouble with official superiors.

But on this occasion, although from the redness of the captain's face the lawyers had an idea that he had been paying considerable attention to the "flowing bowl," yet he had not drank enough to make any particular impression on him.

"But I do not comprehend why anybody should care to go to that trouble," Kaynoll remarked. "We are not likely to say anything which any one would want to hear."

"A guilty conscience, you know!" the officer replied, with an air full of mystery.

"It is understood, you comprehend, that I and Mike are here for the purpose of making an examination into the cause of this death, and there may be a certain party in the house who would like to find out just what I think about the matter," and the captain nodded and looked wise.

"I have fixed them though," he continued, with an air of great satisfaction.

"As long as both doors are closed, and we are careful to speak in a moderate tone, we can talk as freely as we like about this mysterious affair, and no one will be able to hear what we say."

"Well, as I remarked a few moments ago, I don't see why any one should put themselves to any particular trouble to overhear our conversation, nor does this case seem to me to have any mystery about it," Kaynoll remarked.

"Mr. Lecount certainly died without witnesses at hand to watch his death-struggles, but the cause of death is perfectly clear. The doctor had warned him to be prepared to go in just such a way. I know this to be a fact, for Mr. Lecount told me so himself."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that!" the captain exclaimed, in a contemptuous way.

"I know that the doctor thinks it is all right, and you think it is all right, but doctors and lawyers are not detectives," the captain continued. "And it is not to be expected that they can see things which are as plain as A B C to a man who is up to all the dodges that crooks try."

"Well, really, it may be that there is something wrong about this case, but I am not sharp enough to see it!" Kaynoll declared.

"No, nor I," Wirewax coincided. "It seems to me that the case is a perfectly plain one."

"Every man to his trade!" exclaimed the police captain, with the air of an oracle.

"Now then, Mr. Kaynoll," he said, with an important air of authority, "I would like to have a little information out of you, if you please."

"I will be glad to oblige you, if I can," the lawyer replied, considerably puzzled by the request.

"You drew out Mr. Lecount's will, a short time ago?" the official asked.

"I did."

"And I imagine the old gentleman was pretty well fixed—two or three hundred thousand dollars, maybe?"

"No, not so much as that; still pretty comfortably off."

"And this daughter is his only child?"

"Yes."

"Probably his heir," suggested the police captain, in an insinuating way.

And now for the first time a suspicion of what the police captain was driving at entered Kaynoll's mind.

The official was fool enough to entertain the thought that the daughter had contrived the father's death so she might inherit his property.

The idea was so utterly absurd that the lawyer was inclined to laugh outright in Captain Constantine's face, but then a thought came to him that it was possible he could turn this monstrous mistake of the police captain to his own advantage.

He knew the characters of the officials well, a dogmatic, bull-headed fellow who when he once took an idea into his head was inclined to hold on to it, even after everybody else was satisfied that he had made a mistake.

Now then, suppose that instead of attempting to show the official that this notion was totally absurd and entirely inadmissible, he quietly did all he could to urge the captain to keep on in the path into which he had stupidly blundered.

If Captain Constantine showed that he was inclined to persecute the daughter, that would offer him an opportunity to appear as her friend and protector.

If he could secure a claim upon her gratitude, that, in time, might give place to a warmer feeling.

Mentally he exclaimed to himself:

"It is a great game, and I will be hanged if I do not play it for all it is worth!"

Acting on this idea Kaynoll put on a grave expression and shook his head.

"Really, you know, captain, I ought not to give you any information on this point," he said, slowly.

"It is betraying professional confidence, you understand."

"Oh, that is all right!" the captain replied with a knowing wink. "You can depend upon me, you know. It is not like telling it to a man who cannot be trusted. It will not go any further; you can depend upon that! I am square, every time."

"Yes, yes, I know that you are no talker, and that a secret confided to you is perfectly safe."

"I do not mind telling you, Kaynoll, that I do not like the looks of this business at all!" the burly captain declared.

"It is my impression, you understand, that there is something wrong about the business," he continued. "And if there is, you are safe in betting all the money that you have in the world, that I will get to the bottom of the thing and fetch out the truth before I get through with it!" declared the police captain, boastfully.

"Oh, yes, we do not feel any doubt in regard to that, eh, Wirewax?" Kaynoll asked.

"Oh, no, we know you, captain!" the other responded. He knew his partner well enough to understand that he had some game afoot, although he did not exactly comprehend what it was, and so he was anxious to do all he could to help it along.

He guessed at the suspicion which had entered the official's mind, and like Kaynoll regarded it as supremely ridiculous.

"Well, she is his heir then?" the captain questioned.

"Yes, she will inherit nearly all his property, only a few thousand dollars being given to others," Kaynoll replied.

"That is just what I thought might be in the beginning!" the official declared.

"And, Kaynoll, do you think she knew this will had been made and that if her father died she would come in for all the property?" the captain asked, eagerly, his little eyes glistening and a very earnest expression appearing on his fat, pudgy face.

"Oh, yes, she must have known it, of course," Kaynoll answered without a moment's hesitation.

"You know, captain, just what kind of a man the minister was," the lawyer continued.

"He was not the man to keep a matter of that sort secret, you know."

"It would be just like him to explain all the particulars to her as soon as he got the document executed, eh, Wirewax?"

"Oh, yes, probably arranged the whole matter with her before the will was drawn out," Wirewax assented, following his partner's lead to the best of his ability.

"Gentlemen, I am satisfied I have got hold of the tail of the biggest kind of a rat here!" the police captain asserted with the gravity of a judge.

"Well, my dear captain, that comes from years of experience!" Kaynoll declared.

"In a case of this kind it does not take a man like yourself long to come to a correct conclusion."

"I will bring the truth out if it takes a leg!" Captain Constantine exclaimed with firm determination.

"The only trouble will be the doctors!" he continued with a ponderous shake of his big head.

"What of the doctor?" Kaynoll asked in an earnest way.

"Well, I do not take much stock in these doctors. They are inclined to be very obstinate men, you know," the police captain explained, blissfully ignoring the fact that a more obstinate, pig-headed man than himself it would be hard to find in all big New York.

"And this Doctor Cheesboro, too, is one of the big-bugs—they say he is worth half a million," the officer continued.

"One of the kind of men that you cannot do anything with, for he is hand and glove with all the big politicians on both sides, and there is hardly a man in the city who has got a bigger pull," Constantine asserted.

"That is true, I presume," Kaynoll observed. "The doctor is certainly very popular, and has hosts of friends."

"Now, if he has made up his mind that Lecount died from heart disease—and I do not doubt he has, from what he said—the chances are big that he will not want to make an autopsy, but will be satisfied with an ordinary *post-mortem* examination."

"I think that is very likely," Kaynoll observed.

"But it isn't right!" the captain declared in a dogged way. "In a case of this kind there ought always to be an autopsy. If it was a poor devil, in a tenement-house, the doctors would be eager enough to use their knives."

The captain had come up from the lower ranks himself, and so had a natural grudge against men of the upper ten.

"Well, circumstances alter cases, you know," Kaynoll observed. "If Doctor Cheesboro is satisfied in regard to the matter, most certainly he will not make an examination."

"And then, too, you must take into consideration the fact that Mr. Lecount was one of the most popular ministers in the city, a man with a multitude of friends and admirers, and you can be sure there would be the greatest kind of a row kicked up if an autopsy was performed on his remains without it was apparent that it must be done in the interest of justice."

Kaynoll was putting the case as strongly as possible, for he did not want the examination made.

Being satisfied that there had not been any foul play—sure the minister died from natural causes—he knew the autopsy would disclose the fact, and then even the police captain might be satisfied that his suspicion was without foundation, but if the autopsy was not made, Constantine was just idiot enough to go blundering on in the belief that the daughter had something to do with the death of her father, and so play into his hands.

"I don't suppose I can work the thing the way I want it, no matter how big a kick I make!" the official exclaimed in a dissatisfied way.

"The coroner is a doctor too, although he does make a blamed sight more out of politics than out of medicine, but these doctors always stick together, and when old Cheesboro says that Lecount died of heart disease you can bet your life that what he says goes, every time."

"I think it is extremely likely," Kaynoll remarked.

"If I see a chance though I will put my oar in!" the captain exclaimed, doggedly.

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the announcement that the coroner had arrived.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INQUEST.

THE three proceeded to the lower apartment, where they found the coroner, a brisk, active little gentleman, in company with another doctor, whom he had met on the way.

This physician was a man of high standing, second only to Doctor Cheesboro in the district, and both the coroner and physician greeted Doctor Cheesboro with the utmost respect.

"Let me see, you were Mr. Lecount's physician, Doctor Cheesboro, I believe," the coroner remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"I had forgotten the circumstance until seeing you here brought it to my mind, and not thinking that any doctor would be present I brought Doctor Bronson with me," the coroner added.

"I shall be very glad, indeed, to have the doctor's assistance in making the examination," Doctor Cheesboro responded, with a polite bow.

"Although there isn't anything abstruse about the case," he continued.

"Mr. Lecount had been under my care for the past month for heart trouble, and though I warned him that any severe shock, or undue excitement would be likely to prove fatal, yet I did not anticipate the end would come so soon, for I had an idea that if he succeeded in pursuing the calm and even tenor of his way he might live for months, possibly years."

"Ah, well, doctor, we are not prophets to always accurately foretell the future, you know, the best of us," Doctor Bronson remarked.

"Only poor, weak mortals doing the best we can with the gifts which the Lord vouchsafed to us."

"Very true," the coroner coincided.

"And now, gentlemen, we will proceed to the examination, as I am somewhat pressed for time."

Then the witnesses were summoned.

Mignon was the first to tell her story, describing how the body was found; the servants corroborated her account, and then the doctors gave their opinion that it was clear that death had resulted from heart disease, and Doctor Cheesboro, as the physician of the dead man, said he was satisfied to give a certificate to that effect.

"But it seems to me, gentlemen, that there ought to be an autopsy performed," Police Captain Constantine hastened to say at this point.

This announcement was a surprise to all, and the coroner, and both doctors, immediately dissembled.

"Probably it would not be agreeable to the gentleman's daughter, but it is my opinion that it ought to be performed for all that!" the police captain declared in his dogged way.

"As far as I am concerned I have no objection!" Mignon declared. "If it is necessary I am perfectly willing it should be done."

"Oh, no, no!" ejaculated the coroner and the two doctors in a breath.

The three, being educated, sensible men, did not relish the interference of the police captain, of whose qualifications to act as a judge in a case of this kind they had a very poor opinion.

"There is no necessity for any such proceeding!" the coroner declared, with the air of a man who meant what he said.

"Although it is a case of sudden death, yet there is no mystery in regard to the cause," he continued.

"Doctor Cheesboro had been attending him, and his certificate as to the cause of the death is all that the law requires."

"It certainly should be sufficient," the old doctor observed, with considerable dignity.

"I have been a practicing physician in New York City for over forty years, and I can truthfully say that no death certificate of mine was ever yet called into question."

"The cause of death is perfectly clear in my opinion, and I do not consider that there is the slightest need of any further examinations," Doctor Bronson declared in a very decided way.

Dogged and determined as he was, yet Captain Constantine realized that the tide of opinion had set so strongly against him that no words of his would be of any avail.

"Oh, well, gentlemen, if you are satisfied, and you think all the forms that the law requires have been complied with, I have nothing to say," he responded, endeavoring to be pleasant and agreeable.

"Yes, yes; everything has been done decently and in order," the coroner declared.

The police captain did not dare to interpose any objections and the proceedings soon came to an end.

The coroner and doctors departed; Mignon retired to her apartment; the police captain and the two lawyers went up-stairs to the study, leaving the undertaker and his men, who had by this time arrived, to take charge of the body.

"It was just as I expected," Captain Constantine exclaimed, in a tone of deep disgust, to the two lawyers when the three resumed their seats in the study.

"I knew I would not be able to do anything with those doctors," he continued. "When fellows of that kind make up their minds to a thing, they are always mighty touchy if anybody attempts to interfere with them. They think that what they say ought to go, every time."

"Miss Lecount did not seem to be at all affected when you proposed that an autopsy should be made," Wirewax remarked.

"That is, I mean, she did not appear to be disturbed; she appeared a little surprised, and that was all."

"Ah, she is a deep one, now, you had better believe!" the police captain declared, with a knowing shake of the head.

"I have met just such women before, but they are not plenty now, I can tell you," he continued.

"She was just putting up a big bluff, you know, when she said she hadn't any objection to an autopsy being performed; she didn't mean it by a jugful! But she had sized up the doctors and she knew they wouldn't have it, and that was why she had the gall to come out and say she did not care whether the thing was done or not."

"Do you think so?" Kaynoll asked, in a way which seemed to indicate that he did not know what to make of the matter.

"Well, gentlemen, I tell you now, if it was a thing you could bet on I would be satisfied to put up a year's salary on my say-so!" the officer declared.

"That offer certainly indicates that you have a deal of confidence in your judgment," Wirewax remarked.

"Oh, yes, and that is the kind of man I am!" the police captain declared, in a boastful way.

"I am always prepared to back my opinion with the solid stuff!"

"Ah, yes, I see," and Kaynoll gazed on the

officer in such an admiring way that the dogmatic police captain felt greatly flattered.

"But I say, captain, the way the thing stands now it really looks to me as if your game was completely blocked," the lawyer continued, in a thoughtful way.

"Oh, the case is a difficult one; there is no mistake about that!" Captain Constantine admitted.

"The coroner and the doctors having decided that the man died from natural causes, the inference is, as a matter of course, that there isn't anything wrong about the affair," Kaynoll said.

"Yes, yes, I understand all that, and I know the job is a big one, but McGarragh and I have pulled through games just as difficult!" the officer boasted.

The conversation was interrupted at this moment by the arrival of the detective, accompanied by the safe expert.

"By the way, Miss Lecount ought to be present, and I will summon her," Kaynoll remarked, and then he departed to seek the minister's daughter.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DISCOVERY.

IN a few moments the young lawyer returned accompanied by Mignon.

"I have explained to Miss Lecount that as the legal adviser of her deceased father, and also as one of the executors of his will, which I had the honor to draw out, I consider it advisable to have the safe opened so the valuables contained therein can be properly taken care of," Kaynoll remarked.

"Mr. Frederick Hopindyke is my co-executor, but as he is at present in Europe it is not possible to have him present."

"Luckily, though, I happen to have charge of his legal affairs also, and I hold a power of attorney from him, so I am empowered to act in this matter," the young lawyer explained.

"I presume you are acquainted with the conditions of your father's will," the police captain said in an insinuating way to Mignon.

"No, sir, I am not," the girl replied immediately. "In fact, I was not aware that he had made a will."

"That certainly is very strange," the police captain commented.

"It does not seem to me that there is anything strange about the matter," Mignon replied in her cool, composed way.

"My father seldom spoke to me in regard to his business matters and I never questioned him, for I took no interest in the subject, nor did he, for that matter, for he was a man who did not trouble himself much about business matters."

"Yet, if reports are to be believed, he was a wealthy man," Captain Constantine observed.

"That was because money came to him without his having to struggle for it," Mignon replied.

"He was not only a good man in every sense of the word, but he was gifted with talents such as few humans can boast of possessing, and he was so fortunately situated that the world at large was able to appreciate his genius."

"Oh, yes, he was a very remarkable man!" the police captain assented, endeavoring to be as polite and agreeable as possible, so as to the better lead the girl into a trap.

"I suppose you know pretty well what is contained in the safe?" Captain Constantine asked.

"I shall have to plead ignorance," the girl replied. "To the best of my remembrance I never saw the safe open, and so have no idea as to what may be contained therein."

"Your father never said anything in regard to what he kept in the safe?" the police captain asked in surprise.

He was very pleasant about the matter, although he felt certain that the girl was not telling the truth.

"No, sir."

"Well, we will soon see for ourselves," Captain Constantine remarked, now satisfied that he was merely wasting time in endeavoring to get any information out of the minister's daughter.

During the time this conversation had been going on the expert had been examining the safe.

"I do not think I will have much trouble about this matter, gentlemen," he said.

"About six months ago Mr. Lecount took it into his head to change the combination, and then the next time he attempted to open the safe he could not remember how he had set it, and was obliged to send to the factory for me," the expert explained.

"Now I think the chances are good that the combination is the same as it was on that occasion, and if it is I will soon have it open, for I have an excellent memory for that sort of thing," he continued.

Then he manipulated the knob for a few moments, all present watching him with considerable curiosity; an exclamation of satisfaction came from his lips, and he swung the safe door open.

"There it is!" he declared. "I thought my

memory would not go back on me," he continued with considerable pride.

Then he departed.

A look of amazement had appeared on Kaynoll's face the moment the interior of the safe was exposed to view, for his quick eyes had noticed that the United States bonds were not in the pigeon-hole where he had seen the minister put them, but he refrained from saying anything about the matter until the expert was gone, then he spoke.

"Mr. Lecount must have changed the arrangement of his papers in the safe since I saw it," he remarked. "For at that time he had fifteen thousand dollars' worth of United States bonds in the center apartment."

"Fifteen thousand dollars worth?" exclaimed the police captain, in astonishment.

"Well, well, that is a very tidy amount, I must say," he continued.

"And the fact that he kept such an amount as that here in his safe goes to show that he was not as prudent a man as he might be."

"I spoke to him about the matter at the time I drew out the will, when he showed me the bonds—he cut the coupons off at the time—and I advised him that it was not wise to keep so much money in the house, for the bonds were just common ones, not registered, and could be passed from hand to hand about as freely as so much cash."

"But they may be in the safe somewhere—or he may have taken my advice, and put the bonds in the care of a safe deposit company, as I counseled," the lawyer added. "Although he said at the time that he did not think it was worth while to go to that trouble, for he was not afraid of their being stolen."

"Ah, yes, that is the way a good many men talk," the police captain remarked, with a sober shake of his big head.

"Over-confidence has been the ruin of many a man!" he asserted.

"Make a list, Mr. Wirewax, please, as I get them out," Kaynoll said, kneeling at the safe.

"All ready," responded Mr. Wirewax, after he got his writing materials ready.

Then Kaynoll drew out the valuable documents one by one, and gave a description of them, which his partner wrote down.

It did not take long to make the examination, and soon the task was completed, but no United States bonds came to light.

The bonds don't put in an appearance," suggested the police captain, fixing an inquiring glance upon Mignon.

"Do you suppose your father put them in some bank, or safe deposit company?" he continued, addressing Mignon.

"I do not know anything about the matter," the girl replied. "As I informed you, my father never mentioned business affairs to me. It is my impression, though, that he kept all his valuables in the safe."

"Hello! here is a memorandum which I did not notice," Kaynoll exclaimed, holding up a small sheet of note-paper.

"Or this, in pencil, Mr. Lecount has, apparently, jotted down a list of his possessions," the lawyer continued.

"Go over the securities, please, Mr. Wirewax, as I read them off, and we can soon ascertain if anything is missing."

"The first item is United States bonds, fifteen thousand dollars," began Kaynoll.

"Well, the bonds ain't here for sure!" Captain Constantine exclaimed.

"That is certain," Kaynoll remarked, and then he went on with the list, Wirewax answering, "Yes, yes," until the lawyer said, "Michigan Central, five shares."

"Hold on a moment!" Wirewax exclaimed.

"I do not think I have got that."

"No, it is not on my list!" he announced.

"I will go carefully over the papers again, for I may have overlooked the certificate," Kaynoll remarked.

But the examination was a fruitless one, the Michigan Central certificate was missing.

"It is rather odd," the police captain suggested.

"Of course Mr. Lecount may have disposed of these shares and invested the money in some other way," Kaynoll remarked. "But I do not think it is probable that he did," he continued.

"From the appearance of this memorandum I should judge that it was recently drawn out, and I am inclined to the belief that Mr. Lecount made it just about the time when he executed the will, so that he could ascertain just about how he stood financially."

"Very likely, I should say," Wirewax assented, while the big police captain nodded and looked wise.

Then the examination proceeded, the securities being checked off, until Kaynoll read:

"Chicago and Northwestern ten shares—"

"No! No Chicago and Northwestern on the list!" Wirewax exclaimed.

Again Kaynoll made a careful examination of the certificates, but without finding what he sought.

"No Northwestern here," he declared.

"Well, gentlemen, it strikes me that the absence of the United States bonds and these railroad shares is a very suspicious circumstance!"

the police captain declared in his ponderous way.

"It certainly is very strange," Kaynoll observed.

Then he finished the reading of the list.

No more securities were missing.

"Here is Mr. Lecount's will, by the way," the lawyer observed, holding up a large, sealed envelope.

"After the will was duly executed, at Mr. Lecount's request, I sealed it up, and this is it," he continued.

"And as I do not see that there is any need of making a secret of the matter, as long as Mr. Lecount is dead, so I suppose, miss, that you may as well know now as any time that you are your father's heir," Kaynoll announced with a respectful bow to Mignon.

"All his property is left to you with the exception of a few thousand dollars in small bequests."

"The intelligence does not surprise me, for I was sure that my father had always found me worthy of his love, and I had no fear that he would not show by his will how great was his affection for me," Mignon remarked in her plain, straight-forward way.

"The absence of the bonds and the railroad shares make quite a hole in your estate though," the police captain remarked.

"The railroad shares are all right," Kaynoll hastened to say. "Upon application to the respective companies new shares will be issued, and the old ones canceled, but as far as the bonds go, if they have been stolen from the safe, I am afraid they never will be recovered, for it will be almost impossible to trace them."

"It seems to me there isn't any doubt that the bonds and shares have been stolen!" Captain Constantine declared.

"If Mr. Lecount had disposed of them they would not have been in the list," Detective McGarragh observed at this point.

"That is it exactly!" the police captain exclaimed.

"The appearance of the safe does not indicate that any robbery has taken place," Kaynoll objected. "And if somebody has contrived to get access to it, how comes it that the party did not make a clean sweep of the contents?"

"Oh, I haven't any idea that any regular crooks did the job!" the police captain replied.

"Oh, no!" Detective McGarragh assented with a wise shake of the head.

"No professional cracksmen did this job, for if they had they would have left some traces behind them," the detective continued. "And you can depend upon it that I would very soon get on the track."

"You think, then, that some one in the house has managed to gain access to the safe?" Kaynoll asked, very much puzzled by this strange affair.

"That is it! now you have hit it!" the police captain declared.

"That is the only way in which the job could have been done," he continued.

"It is what we call an inside affair," he added.

"And although the trick has been worked about as well as anything of the kind that ever came in my way, yet I think I can get at the rights of it."

"Of course, it is in your line and not at all in mine, so it is not strange that I cannot understand how the safe could have been robbed," Kaynoll remarked.

"The party who got away with the boodle lives in the house," the police captain explained. "No stranger, you understand, for a stranger couldn't have known that the boodle was in the safe."

"That is very true," Kaynoll assented.

"The party who did the work is some one who has been in this room some time when the safe happened to be open and so saw the bonds in it, or else Mr. Lecount was imprudent enough to reveal to this party that he had the bonds in the safe, or, then again, maybe, the party didn't know for sure just what was in the safe but went on the idea that it was likely if they could get a crack at it that they might get hold of some valuables."

"Yes, but how did they contrive to get at the contents of the safe?" Wirewax asked, rather inclined to be incredulous.

"Watched their opportunity and sneaked into the room some time when the safe was open, snatched the boodle and then skipped with it!" Captain Constantine declared in a tone which plainly showed that he was fully confident he had hit upon the true explanation of the mystery.

An incredulous look appeared on Mignon's face.

"It is possible, of course, that the safe may have been robbed in this way," she remarked, "but I do not think it is probable."

"The servants had access to the room at times, and it might be that my father neglected to close the safe on one of these occasions, but I think it very unlikely that anything of the kind happened, for I have been an inmate of the house for over a year now, ever since I returned from England, and I cannot recall that I ever saw the safe open."

"That is the way the job was worked and you

can depend upon it!" the police captain declared in a very positive way. "And if you want me to take charge of the case I will put Mr. McGarragh here on the track, and I haven't any doubt that in time I can nail the right party."

"Certainly I shall be very glad indeed to have you attend to the matter," Mignon replied.

"It is no joke to be robbed of sixteen or seventeen thousand dollars, and I will gladly do all in my power to assist you to catch the guilty one."

"We will go right at it!" the captain declared.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUNTING FOR A CLEW.

THE first thing to be done is to fix the time of the robbery as nearly as possible," Captain Constantine remarked after thinking the matter over for a few moments, and then he looked in a questioning way at Mignon.

"I cannot give you any information," the girl responded, perceiving that the police captain expected her to speak.

"As I informed you, I had no knowledge that the bonds were in the safe. I imagined that my father kept important papers in it, but he never spoke about the matter and I never questioned him."

"I think it is very probable that I can give you as much information about the matter as you are likely to obtain," Kaynoll remarked.

"Of course it is possible that some of the servants may have seen the safe open after the time when I drew out the will, and so got a sight of the bonds, but I don't think it is likely."

"And there is a big chance too that they wouldn't own up to it if they did," Captain Constantine commented.

"That is true," the detective coincided, "for it is very likely that the one who saw the bonds in the safe is the party that got away with them."

"Yes, that is my idea," the police captain remarked.

"It would be advisable, though, I think, to inquire about the matter," Kaynoll suggested.

"Oh, yes, we will examine and question everybody in the house who could possibly have got at this room, if you have no objection, miss," Captain Constantine remarked, with a polite bow to Mignon.

"Certainly not!" the girl declared. "I shall be only too glad to aid you all I possibly can."

"I will summon Mrs. Monford, the housekeeper, who has charge of the household, and she will be able to give you all the particulars in regard to the servants."

"Yes, she has been Mr. Lecount's housekeeper for three or four years now, and I have always regarded her as a very superior woman," Kaynoll remarked. "Mr. Lecount thought highly of her, and remembered her in his will to the extent of a thousand dollars."

"Well, that is pretty strong evidence of how he appreciated her services," Captain Constantine observed. "And if she is a woman of that kind, it may be as well to let her know just what the trouble is."

"Yes, I should certainly advise it," Kaynoll assented.

Then Mignon rung the bell, and when the servant answered the call, desired the man to summon the housekeeper.

In a few minutes the lady made her appearance. She was a medium-sized woman, of fifty-five or thereabouts, well preserved, and inclined to stoutness, and with a decidedly English face.

Her quiet, lady-like appearance produced a favorable impression upon both the police captain and the detective.

Captain Constantine requested the lady to take a chair, and then explained what had occurred.

"I am very sorry, sir, that I am not able to throw any light upon the mystery," the housekeeper replied, evidently both puzzled and grieved.

"I knew, of course, that the safe was in the room, and I imagined that Mr. Lecount kept his valuable papers in it, but I had no suspicion that it contained anything that anybody would want to steal. In fact, I don't remember to have ever seen the safe open."

"Are any of the servants in the habit of coming to this room?" the police captain asked.

"Only the chambermaid once a week for the purpose of cleaning the apartment, and then I have always made it a rule to be present while she did her work, as Mr. Lecount sometimes was not particular to put his books and papers away, and I have ever had the fear in my mind that the girl might be careless enough to disarrange, or destroy something."

"What sort of a girl is this housemaid?" the official asked.

"Her name is Katy Kelly, an Irish-American girl, very nice, and, I am sure, perfectly trustworthy," the housekeeper replied.

"My dear madam, it is pretty hard work to tell nowadays who is trustworthy and who is not," the police captain remarked, with the air of an oracle.

"Oh, yes; of course I know that appearances are often deceptive," Mrs. Monford replied. "But in this case I do not think there is any room for doubt. The girl has been in the house

for nearly ten years; she was only fifteen when she came, I understand. I have seen her folks, and they appear to be nice, respectable people."

"Well, I presume it would not be a difficult matter for some of the other servants to enter the room while Mr. Lecount was absent—say that the party took advantage of the dinner hour, when the upper part of the house is usually deserted?" the police captain suggested.

"Oh, yes; it would be easy for any one to steal into the room at meal time," the housekeeper replied in a thoughtful way.

"Neither the door of this room, nor the one to Mr. Lecount's sleeping apartments are ever locked, excepting at night."

"I think I had better take a look at all the servants in the house," Captain Constantine observed.

"I have a pretty keen eye for spotting a guilty party," the police captain continued. "And if there is anything crooked about any of the servants, it is very likely that I will be able to detect it."

It was plainly evident from this speech that the police captain had an extremely good opinion of himself, which was more than the minister's daughter possessed, but she had such a perfect command of herself that no trace of disbelief appeared on her features.

"If you will kindly arrange, madam, to have all the servants come before me, one by one, commencing with the housemaid, I will be much obliged to you," Captain Constantine continued, addressing Mrs. Monford.

"Certainly, sir. I will attend to it immediately," and then the housekeeper departed.

"Of course, gentlemen, I don't know as this will amount to anything," the police captain remarked, with his magisterial air.

"But I consider that it is necessary, in a case of this kind, to try all sorts of ways to get at the truth," he continued.

"It may be possible, you understand, that some crook has contrived to get into the house," the police captain explained.

"There are quite a number of crooks in the city who make a business of getting into the houses of wealthy men, so as to get an opportunity of walking off with any plunder that may be laying around loose."

"And then the game is sometimes worked in another way, and this is the hardest trick for the detectives to get onto: the party in the house does not steal anything, but simply gives the game away to the pals on the outside, who take a favorable opportunity to get into the house and collar the swag."

"Yes, I have read of such things in the newspapers," Kaynoll remarked.

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the return of the housekeeper, who was followed by a pleasant-faced young woman, whose features plainly betrayed her Irish parentage.

The police captain explained that some valuable documents were missing from the safe, and inquired if she had ever seen the door of the safe open at any time.

"Oh, no, sir," the girl answered. "Never! and I have never been in the room without Mrs. Monford being with me."

And from the way she spoke it was evident that she was considerably alarmed lest some blame should be attached to her.

"Do not be alarmed, my girl. I am satisfied that you are all right, but I didn't know but what Mr. Lecount might have carelessly left the safe unlocked on some occasion, then the papers might have dropped out, and you happened to pick them up, and, not knowing the papers to be valuable, possibly stuck them away somewhere."

The girl replied in the negative, repeating that she had never seen the door of the safe open, and she understood her duties too well to ever meddle with any papers in that particular room.

"If I had seen any papers on the floor," she said, in conclusion, "I would have given them to Mrs. Monford right away."

Then Captain Constantine instructed the girl to take a seat, and asked the housekeeper to send in another one of the servants.

The rest understood at once what the police captain was up to in directing the girl to remain in the room.

This was to prevent her from giving a hint to any of the rest as to why they were summoned.

The servants were introduced one by one, and examined by the police captain, but one and all declared they had not been in the room for some time, and knew nothing about any missing documents.

Then they were all dismissed, with a caution that it would be well for them not to say anything about the matter, as it might hinder the search for the missing articles.

And as Mignon listened to the caution of the pompous police captain the thought came to her that if the man really believed he could keep the servants' tongues from wagging about the matter by simply telling them that they ought not to talk, then he was a greater fool than she had taken him to be.

After the servants had departed, the captain turned to Lawyer Kaynoll, and said:

"As far as I can judge the servants are all

right; there does not appear to be a suspicious character among them."

"There is not one who has not been in the house for over a year," Mignon remarked.

"My father paid good wages, and made a point of getting the best servants who were to be had."

"I should judge so from the appearance of the lot," Captain Constantine responded.

"We will have to look a little further, but I don't doubt that Mr. McGarragh and I will be able to pick up a clew in a few days which will put us on the track of the right parties."

"I should advise that the matter be kept quiet for a while," he continued, "for if the parties who have taken the bonds and railroad shares get the notion into their heads that the valuables have not been missed, it will be apt to make them careless and then we may be able to trap them."

"I presume, Miss Lecount, you are willing to be guided by the advice of the captain in this matter?" Kaynoll asked.

"Certainly! I should not presume to advise a gentleman of his experience," Mignon replied. "I am content to leave the matter in his hands until he succeeds in catching the guilty parties, or gives up the task in disgust."

"There is not much fear of my doing that!" Captain Constantine declared.

Somehow, there was something in the girl's tone which grated unpleasantly on his ears.

He could hardly believe it to be possible that she was making fun of him, and yet he had the disagreeable impression that she was.

"We will nab them in time, no doubt!" he declared as he and the detective departed.

CHAPTER XV.

UNEXPECTED INTELLIGENCE.

As the police captain descended the stairs he meditated over the words of the girl, and the more he reflected upon the matter the greater became his conviction that she did not believe he would be able to accomplish anything.

"By Jove! Mac, I have got the opinion that this young woman thinks we are no good!" he declared to his satellite.

"Yes, it struck me that she didn't think we would be able to do anything," the detective replied, always ready to agree with his superior officer.

"Well, now, Mac, you can just bet your life that I will put the collar on the party who got away with this hoodle if it takes a leg!" the police captain declared, boastfully.

"It is a mighty mixed-up piece of business at present," McGarragh remarked with a dubious shake of the head.

"The thing has been covered up well; there is no mistake about that, but I think I can smell it out!" the police captain asserted.

"I have an idea in my head, and if it don't turn out to be about right, I shall be greatly surprised. This gal thinks she is mighty smart, but before she gets through with the business she may discover that there are other smart people in the world besides herself."

By this time they had reached the foot of the stairs, and the young man who acted as footman came forward to open the door for them.

He was a lad of nineteen or twenty, and from his appearance appeared to be of English birth.

The police captain cast a quick look around. No one was near.

Captain Constantine motioned for the detective to pass through, and then he followed, halting in the entrance.

"You have got a pretty good place here, haven't you?" the police captain remarked to the boy in a very affable way.

"Yes, sir, a fine place," the lad responded with a grin.

"Well, I reckon you attend to it all right, for, from your looks, I should take you to be a smart young fellow."

The boy ducked his head in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"I tried to do my best, sir," he replied.

"How would you like to make a five-dollar note?" and as the police captain spoke he took a five-dollar bill out of his pocket and held it up.

The lad's eyes sparkled.

"I would be glad to make it if I could, sir!" he declared.

"You can do it easily enough," Captain Constantine replied.

"I suppose you see about every one who goes in an out?"

"Yes, sir; it is my place to attend to the door."

"Now, you know who I am, and you know there has been some trouble about some documents that are missing."

"Yes, sir."

"And in order to get at the facts of the matter it is important for me to know who comes to this house during the next week or two, and who they come to see."

"Now, if you will make a list of all the people who come, and who they want to see—and if there are any parties who don't give their names you are to write down a description of them as well as you can. I will give you this fiver for your trouble, and if you furnish me a good report, and I am able to make anything

out of it, why, I will put another fiver on top of it."

The lad grinned, and there was a covetous look in his eyes; then his face sobered down and he shook his head.

"What is the matter?" the police captain asked. "Surely you aren't hesitating about taking the fiver? Why, I should think you would jump at the chance!"

"I would like to get the money well enough!" the youth answered. "But, mebbe, if it was found out in the house here I would get the sack."

"The G. B. eh? the grand bounce!" exclaimed Captain Constantine, in a jocose manner.

"Well, my boy, perhaps the powers that be might object to your playing a little game of this sort if they knew it, and there is just where the little joker comes in, you see! Who is going to know, unless you are fool enough to let the cat out of the bag, for you can bet high that neither I, nor my friend here, are going to say anything about it. We don't do business that way, hey, Mac?"

"No, sir—ee! not by a jugful!" the detective responded, promptly. "So, young feller, you need not be at all afraid to go into this game, for nobody will ever know anything about it, unless you choose to be fool enough to give the snap away, so if you are wise you will catch on to this thing as soon as you can."

While the two had been speaking the boy had apparently been debating the matter in his mind, for now he said:

"All right! I don't see why I shouldn't make five dollars when I can do it so easily!"

"Cert! Your head wouldn't be screwed on right if you didn't grab the chance!" Captain Constantine declared.

"Stow the fiver away!" and he forced the bill into the lad's hand.

"Now be sure to keep your eyes open! Don't miss a man, woman or child who calls here, no matter if the party doesn't seem to amount to anything; and, in particular, keep your eyes skinned for Miss Lecount's visitors!" the police captain warned.

"Oh, I will keep a good lookout! You can depend upon that!" the youth declared, pocketing the five-dollar note in great delight.

"All right! be sure you do, and every night, after you get through your work, just make up your list and mail it to me, or come with it yourself, if you can possibly arrange to do the business in that way, for that will be much better."

"You know where the station-house is?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Very well then, I will depend upon you, and if you do the job up brown the chances are big that you will catch onto another fiver."

"Yes, sir, I will do the best I can."

And then the captain and the detective departed, feeling well satisfied that the boy could be trusted to perform the task to the best of his ability.

"There isn't anything to be done now but to wait," the police captain remarked. "Wait until something turns up."

"That is the game—just wait!" McGarragh asserted, as he always did.

The pair pursued their usual avocations during the day, and, about eight o'clock in the evening, were standing at the corner of the street, nearest to the police-station, enjoying their cigars, when a newsboy came up the cross-street and, halting in front of the official, said:

"Is your Captain Constantine?"

"That is my name, sonny."

"Dere's a woman down der street dat wants to speak to you. See?"

"Where is she?"

"In de middle of de next block—if yous goes down dere yous will see her."

"All right! I will attend to it," responded the captain.

"Come on, Mac," he said to the detective.

And then, after he had got out of the hearing of the boy, he continued:

"Keep a couple of hundred feet behind me, and be in readiness to advance if you are needed. There are so many cranks around that a man never can tell when he is likely to run up against one."

"That's so! A man has got to keep his eyes peeled if he travels around much nowadays."

As the boy had said, there was a woman standing in a dark place in the middle of the block, and as Captain Constantine came up to her he saw that she was of stout build, and apparently well along in years, dressed rather poorly, too, like one who was compelled to toil hard for a living.

Her features were hidden by a dark veil, but as far as the police captain could make out, she was fat-faced and had iron-gray hair.

"I asks your parding, captain, for troubling you," the woman began, speaking with such a decided English accent that Captain Constantine had no trouble in deciding in regard to her nationality.

"That is all right, madam," the police captain replied, with a gracious wave of his fat hand.

"I presume you have business with me."

"Yes, indeed, captain, and very important business it is too, as I think you will say arter you find out what it is."

"Go ahead!"

"I was embolden to come to you on account of the way you talked to Danny," the woman declared.

"Danny? who is Danny?"

"He is the young man at Mr. Lecount's who attends to the door, you know."

"Oho! he is!" the police captain exclaimed, all attention now, for he anticipated that something of importance was coming.

"Yes, sir, and Danny is a rare, cunning lad, although you might not think it, to look at him."

"Well, I took him to be a pretty smart young chap," the police captain remarked, in a patronizing way.

"Ah, Danny is as cunning as a fox, but he is not very brave, and is always afraid of getting into trouble."

"As far as any business with me is concerned he need not fear. I will take care of him all right," Captain Constantine declared.

"But Danny is as timid as a hare, and though he might have courage enough to tell me anything, he wouldn't tell any one else."

"Suppose you tell me if you know of anything important," the police captain suggested, in a wheedling way.

"That is just what I have come to do, captain, but you are not to let on to anybody who told you, and then there will not be any trouble."

"Don't be afraid! go ahead!"

Thus encouraged the woman described how a young man had called upon Miss Lecount, sending in his card in such a queer way that a certain party was induced to listen to the conversation.

The young man was an actor, and had been Miss Lecount's sweetheart in England, and now he was in a dreadful need of money, and had come to her for some, which she gave him; then told him to come that night at eleven o'clock, to the basement door, and there would be more for him. He was not to ring, for she would be on the lookout, and, sure enough, that night, at about eleven, Miss Lecount did go down to the basement door, but whether she met the actor or not, the party didn't know, for he was afraid to watch.

The actor's name was Edgar Somerset, and then she told where he boarded.

"Aha!" thought the captain, "that is where the bonds and railroad stock went!"

Then the woman begged again that he would not betray how the information reached him, and, upon his giving the promise, the veiled woman took her departure.

CHAPTER XVI.

ACTING ON THE INFORMATION.

THE police captain watched the woman as she passed into the shadows, caressing his bristling mustache in a self-satisfied way.

"This is a piece of rare good luck!" he declared. "But, somehow, I kind of expected I would be able to turn up trumps in this game, although I didn't exactly see how the trick was going to be worked, but this little affair gives me a pointer and it will be mighty odd now if I don't succeed in bagging the game."

Then the police captain turned and retraced his way.

McGarragh came out of the shadow of the doorway, where he had been lurking, and from which he had watched the interview, and advanced to meet the captain.

"I have struck something, Mac!" Captain Constantine announced.

"That is good! What is it?"

"This Lecount business."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes I do! There isn't any mistake about the matter."

"You are lucky!"

Then the police captain related the particulars of the interview.

"Well, if this doesn't just beat the deck!" the detective declared in amazement.

"Yes, it is a mighty odd thing and no mistake."

"What do you make of it, anyhow?" the detective asked in a thoughtful way.

"I haven't had time to figure the thing out, but, as it looks now, it seems to me that I made a good guess right at the beginning."

"You know I had a suspicion the moment I was called into the case that there was something wrong."

"That is true!" McGarragh asserted. "If you hadn't told me anything about the matter I would have known it by the way you acted."

"I have got a famous nose for smelling out anything wrong!" the police captain declared, boastfully.

"And I can tell you, Mac, the moment I began to examine into this Lecount affair I got the impression that there was something crooked about it."

"I kind of felt it hovering around me in the air, you know," Captain Constantine continued in a grandiloquent way.

"Oh, yes, sort of smelled it out by instinct," observed the detective, who always made it a point to agree with the captain, and never lost an opportunity to flatter him.

"Well, really, it does seem sometimes that it is in that way," the official observed, reflectively.

"As I tell you, the moment I got into the house I suspected there was something wrong. My first notion was that the old codger had come to his death by foul means, but I reckon I was wrong about that, for upon thinking the matter over it does not seem to me to be likely all three of the doctors could make a mistake, and that old buffer Cheesboro, is a hummer of a doctor too."

"Oh, I don't think there is a doubt that the minister did die of heart disease and there wasn't anything wrong as far as his death is concerned," the detective remarked.

"Well, what led me into the error of thinking the thing wasn't all square was the suspicion I had as soon as I came into the business that something was wrong, but when the safe business came on the carpet I understood then what the matter was."

"But you see I was correct in thinking there was something crooked about the girl."

"Oh, yes, she is a deep one, and I can just tell you, captain, there isn't many men who could have spotted her as quickly as you did!"

"Well, Mac, I think I may say, without boasting, that anybody who pulls the wool over my eyes will have to get up mighty early in the morning," the official observed, complacently.

"Right you are, captain, and no mistake!" the detective declared with warm emphasis.

"Now then, when I come to study this thing over I think I can get it down pretty fine," the police captain declared, backing up against the iron railing, which ornamented the front of the house, before which the two were standing, preparing to make himself comfortable while he talked.

"First and foremost this woman who has given the information is, probably, the mother of the footman, the fellow that I hired to watch the daughter," the captain went on.

"He told his mother how I put up a five-dollar note like a gentleman, and she was eager to do me a good turn, but was afraid to come right out for fear of getting in to trouble."

"Very likely; people of that kind are sneaky, and she was afraid that her son might lose his job if it should get out that he gave the thing away."

"That is about the size of it," the police captain responded in his confident way.

"She thought that as I was so prompt in putting up the five there might be some money in this matter, and I told her right out that if the information proved to be valuable I would see that it would be good money in her pocket."

"She will tell her son, of course, and that will be certain to make him keep his eyes open."

"Yes, I did not make any mistake in putting up the five; I planted it where it will do a heap of good."

"A wise investment!"

"Now then, to figure the thing out," the police captain observed with a very grave air.

"I will go ahead and explain my ideas, and if you think I am on the wrong track at any time just say so."

"All right."

"You know there is an old saying that ministers' children don't generally take after their dads," Captain Constantine remarked.

"Yes, and from what I know about the matter I do not doubt that there is a deal of truth in the saying."

"This girl is a deep one! Any one who is a judge of character can see that at a glance."

"That is true."

"She has traveled a good deal in foreign parts, I understand, and, in fact, there seems to be a little bit of mystery attached to her, and it maybe, you know, that she has been up to all sorts of mischief abroad!"

"Oh, yes, and as she is evidently one of the kind who has sense enough to hold her tongue, no one would be likely to get anything out of her."

"This English actor, Somerset, is an old acquaintance, but from the peculiar way he sent in the message it is pretty evident that he had serious doubts as to whether the girl would want to see him or not."

"And that is rather strange too."

"Yes, if everything was all square, and above-board, he would not have had any doubts in regard to her reception, but as it is you can see he did not feel sure."

"He is an actor, you understand, and she is a minister's daughter," the police captain continued.

"In England, where nobody knew, or cared much about her, it was all right, but here in New York, the situation is very different."

"Her dad was one of the big preachers of the city, and if it got 'round that she had an actor calling on her, it would be apt to make a heap of talk."

"You can bet high on that!" McGarragh declared, emphatically.

"The girl was game enough to see him through, even at the risk of having a row kicked up about it, and from what took place between them, as far as the spy could see, it looks as if there was a love affair."

"That is so."

"The actor was apparently in hard luck—"

"Most actors that I have run across usually are!" interrupted the detective, with a grin.

"I reckon that is about so," the police captain assented.

"He was in hard luck—broke, of course, and she helped him out."

"There isn't any doubt about that, if the woman told me the truth, and I would bet a small fortune that she was telling the thing as straight as a string."

"Yes, yes, for sure!"

"Now I think the chances are big that she went out and met this actor chap somewhere, and at that meeting the pair fixed the plan to get away with the bonds."

"The girl was tired of staying home, and wanted to get out into the world again."

"She knew the bonds were in the safe, and she was acquainted with the secret of the combination."

"Oh, yes, the odds are big that that is so, although she pretended she didn't know anything about her father's business."

"That is all bosh, of course!" the police captain declared. "You can bet your life that a sharp, deep girl, like she is, knew all about everything in the house."

"Excepting the will," Captain Constantine added, after a moment's pause.

"Somehow, I have got the idea that she didn't know anything about that, for if she had she wouldn't have put up any game of this kind with the actor chap," he continued.

"The chances are big, you know, that her father had got onto some of her rackets in England, and had threatened that if she didn't behave herself he wouldn't leave her any of his money, and that is the reason why he didn't tell her anything about the will."

"I think you have got that all straight, captain," the detective remarked.

"Then, just at the time when she was having trouble with the old man, the actor chap turned up," the captain continued, elaborating the theory which he had constructed in his mind from an extremely unsubstantial basis.

"The girl felt ugly—she knew of the bonds, right within reach of her hand—probably told the actor of them, and then the two hatched the scheme to get away with the boodle," the police captain continued.

"I reckon you have got that down pretty fine, captain!" the detective declared, in an admiring tone.

"I can understand just how the pair figured the thing up!" said the police captain, beaming with a bland smile on his satellite.

"In the first place they calculated that the old man might not discover the loss of the bonds for some time, and then when he found that both his money and his daughter were among the missing he would jump to the natural conclusion that they had gone off together, and, under the circumstances, he would not be liable to kick up much of a row on account of the scandal it would occasion."

"That calculation was a pretty good one," the detective observed, with a knowing look.

"A man with as much money as this minister, could afford to give fifteen, or twenty thousand dollars even, rather than allow the world to know that he had a daughter who was willing to put up such a mean job as that on him."

"The thing was mighty well-planned!" the police captain declared, in an admiring tone.

"And if it had not been for the sudden, and totally unexpected death of the old man there is hardly a doubt but what it would have gone through all right."

"Say, capt, it seems to me that this is going to be a very mixed-up affair!" McGarragh exclaimed, abruptly.

"There isn't a doubt in my mind but that you have got the thing down fine," the detective continued.

"The gal and the actor are the ones who got away with the boodle."

"It was her father's money when it was stolen from the safe, but now that the old man is dead, and she has come in for all the property the money belongs to her, and you can't very well arrest a woman for stealing her own money."

"Mac, that is a pretty nice law-point that you have fetched up, and it shows that you have got a big head," the official remarked, with a patronizing smile.

"At the first break I will have to admit that it don't look as if there was much of anything for us in this case," the police captain continued.

"But you can bet your bottom dollar that if I didn't see a stake in the thing I wouldn't bother my head about it."

"I don't mind letting this out to you, Mac, for we are old pals."

"Well, that is what we are in the business for, of course, to make a stake once in a while," the detective remarked.

"Now, then, here is the point: It is the actor chap that we are after. He is our mutton! He is the man that got away with the boodle, and I think the odds are big that if we go and get a search-warrant, so as to come right down on him, we will be able to nab him with the bonds in his possession."

"It is likely," the detective assented. "And

it would be a mighty fine stroke of business, too," he continued.

"Now, then, if we nab the man, and collar the boodle, the game is right in our hands!" the police captain declared.

"The odds are a thousand to one that when the actor chap gets the collar and finds he is in a hole he will weaken in the worst kind of a way."

"Oh, yes; if he doesn't, he is made of stouter stuff than the majority of men."

"He will squeal on the gal and declare that she gave him the swag—you are following me, Mac?"

"You bet your sweet life!"

"Then we will say: 'Oh, if there is a lady in the case, we must go slowly.'"

"Ah, yes, go slowly; that is fine!" and then the detective chuckled and rubbed his hands gleefully together.

"As long as there is a lady concerned we will be careful how we go ahead," the police captain continued, a cunning smile on his fat face.

"Now, although it seems quite plain to us that we have caught you dead to rights, yet it may be possible that the thing can be explained and arranged."

"Yes, yes; that is good—explained and arranged. Ah! that is the ticket!" McGarragh exclaimed.

"So, instead of taking you to the Tombs, and having you locked up in a cell, we will pay a visit to some quiet hotel. We will be in plain clothes when we make the arrest, therefore our going to a hotel with him will not excite any attention."

"Exactly! Oh, I understand just how the thing can be worked."

"You can stay at the hotel with my friend, here," I will explain, "and I will call upon Miss Lecount and see what she has to say about the matter."

"And won't she be astonished, too, when she finds that you have got onto the little racket!" cried McGarragh, highly delighted.

"Why, she will be that taken aback that you could knock her down with a feather!"

"I reckon she will be rather flabbergasted, as the Western fellows say!" the police captain declared.

"Then I will lay down the law to her—just let her see that I have nabbed her lover with the boodle, and ask her what she is going to do about it."

"She may show fight!"

"Oh, no, for if she evinced any disposition to try any game of that kind I would let her understand that she would get the worst of it, for I would run the actor right into court, and if the newspaper men once got hold of the affair they would make a mighty big row about it."

"That is so! The thing would cause a heap of talk if it once got out."

"I will tell her, right plain, if she is at all inclined to be reasonable, that if she wants to hush up the matter it does not make any difference to us, we are agreeable, for we haven't got anything against the young man, only as we have been put to considerable trouble and expense it is no more than fair that we should be paid for our services."

"It ought to be worth a cool thousand now, eh?" asked the detective.

"That is exactly the figure to a cent that I had in my mind!" the police captain responded.

"A little money would come in very handy to me just now," McGarragh remarked in a reflective way.

"I have been playing the races for a month or two, and I will be hanged if I have succeeded in picking more than one winner out of ten tries. In fact, I have been playing in the worst kind of luck."

"Well, things ain't been running well with me either for the last few months," Captain Constantine declared. "But if this little game goes through, and I can't see why it should not work all right, we will be in funds."

"Oh, I don't think there is a doubt about our getting the stake. The gal would be a fool to show fight, and a thousand chucks is just a flea-bite to her."

"Yes, the game is in our hands, and from the way the thing has turned out it appears to me as if I never invested a five-dollar bill to better advantage in my life."

"No mistake about that!" the detective assented.

"You see I was right about the boy; it isn't often that I make a mistake about a thing of that kind!" the police captain declared in his egotistical way.

"I knew from his face that he was a cunning son-of-a-gun, but I will admit that I didn't think he was up to such a game as playing the spy upon the gal."

"The young rat thought there was something in the wind, and he was curious to find out just what it was."

"That is it, and it is a mighty lucky thing for us that the affair has turned out as it has; but I understand the game now," the police captain declared.

"The quiet home-life didn't suit the girl, and when the Englishman turned up she thought there was a good chance for her to get out; she

helped herself to the bonds because she knew when her father missed them he would understand that she had taken them, and she, probably, calculated to cut her lucky herself the next day, and then, perhaps, she intended to leave a letter explaining matters, calculating that the old man would not dare to kick up a row about the thing on account of the scandal it would make."

"You have got it down fine!" the detective declared.

"And, by the way, as the affair is bound to be hushed up, what is the use of bothering to swear out a warrant?" he asked.

"Why can't I fix up a fake warrant which will do just as well?" McGarragh continued.

"The actor will never know the difference, you see, and he will be so taken aback anyway when we put the collar on him that he will not be apt to know whether he is standing on his heels or his head."

"You are right! that is the best way to work it!" Captain Constantine declared. "And I think we had best nail him right away. I will put on plain clothes too, so that the people in the boarding-house will not be able to get onto the racket, for it is our little game, you know, to manage the things as quietly as we can."

"You bet!" cried the detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ARREST.

EDGAR SOMERSET was sitting in his room in the theatrical boarding-house, reading one of the evening journals, when there came a knock at his door, and in answer to his "come in!" two well-dressed strangers made their appearance.

As the reader doubtless has anticipated, the newcomers were McGarragh, the detective and Captain Constantine in plain clothes.

By an ingenious maneuver they had succeeded in ascending to his room without having the servant tagging at their heels, ready to be a witness to their reception.

When the maid-servant answered their ring at the bell, the captain had carelessly asked:

"Is Edgar in—Mr. Somerset, I mean?" he corrected, as a puzzled look appeared on the girl's face.

When she replied that she thought he was, the captain said:

"Oh, I think there isn't any doubt about it, for he expects us, and we will go right up. You know his room, Mac, don't you?" he continued.

"Yes, I think I can find it again without any trouble," the detective replied in the same careless way.

The girl fell immediately into the trap.

"It is on the third floor, the back room at the head of the stairs," she remarked, thinking the pair were some of the theatrical friends of the young actor.

"Oh, yes, I can find it again all right," McGarragh declared.

So the girl returned to her duties down-stairs, leaving the pair free to ascend, little thinking she had given admittance to the enemy.

And thus it happened that the pair were able to reach the young actor's room without any trouble.

The two walked into the apartment, closing the door behind them, and nodded in the most friendly manner to Somerset, who looked in questioning wonder at his visitors.

"Mr. Edgar Somerset, I presume?" said the police captain, with a polite bow.

"Yes, sir, that is my name."

"We have come to see you on a rather unpleasant little bit of business," the official remarked.

"I am sorry to hear it, although for the life of me I cannot imagine what it is!" Somerset declared.

"Possibly after we have introduced ourselves you will be able to conjecture," the police captain said with elaborate politeness.

"My name is Constantine, and I have the honor to hold the office of police captain of the precinct in which Mr. Lecount's house is situated."

The young actor bowed, and the look of surprise on his face deepened.

"This gentleman is one of my ward detectives, Mr. Michael McGarragh."

Again Somerset bowed, and McGarragh opened his coat so as to show his detective badge.

"I presume by the way that you have heard of the sudden death of Mr. Lecount?"

"Yes, I was just reading the particulars in the newspaper," the young actor replied.

"I have no doubt it was a great surprise to you," the police captain remarked in a suggestive way.

"Yes, it was, although I had not the pleasure of knowing the gentleman."

"You are well acquainted with his daughter though?" Captain Constantine responded, quickly.

"Yes, I have the honor of knowing her," Somerset replied, looking more and more surprised.

"Oh, we know all about the little affair!" Captain Constantine declared. "You were acquainted with her in England?"

"Yes, I was."

"I fancy that you have not been very long in this country?" the police captain continued.

"No, about a couple of weeks."

"But you contrived to find Miss Lecount without any trouble though—I suppose you corresponded with her?" the official suggested in an insinuating way.

The young Englishman's face flushed.

"Really, you must excuse me from remarking, you know, that I am not able to see how this matter can possibly concern you!" Somerset exclaimed, evidently annoyed.

"Oh, we take quite an interest in the affair, and we have a right to do so, as I think you will be obliged to admit very soon!" Captain Constantine declared.

"Sir, you are speaking in riddles! I do not understand you, and I would be obliged if you will kindly explain what you mean," the young actor observed with icy politeness.

"A very few words will do that!" the official replied.

"As Mr. Lecount's death was a sudden one, the proper authorities had to be notified, and so Mr. McGarragh and myself came into the case."

"You are aware, if you have read the newspaper accounts, that the doctors pronounced the minister's death due to natural causes, although some people, at first, were inclined to suspect there might have been some foul play in connection with the matter."

"As it happened, the lawyer who had charge of Mr. Lecount's affairs was present, and at his suggestion an expert was summoned to open the dead man's safe, so as to ascertain whether everything was all correct or not."

"As an experienced police officer, I had a suspicion that something was wrong," the captain announced, in his pompous way.

"An opinion which was shared by Detective McGarragh."

And here the detective nodded and looked wise.

"When the safe was opened my suspicions were confirmed," the police captain continued.

"Fifteen thousand dollars' worth of United States bonds, five shares of Michigan Central and ten shares of Chicago and Northwestern railroad stock were gone."

"What on earth has this got to do with me?" exclaimed the young actor, impatiently.

"My dear fellow, we are going to be very candid with you—it is our belief that you are the man who got away with the valuables!"

"You don't mean it!" cried Somerset, sitting bolt upright in his chair and gazing at the pair with distended eyes, the very picture of astonishment.

"Oh, yes, we mean it, fast enough!" the police captain replied.

"We are just in dead earnest—you can bet your life on that!" Captain Constantine continued. "We would not have taken the trouble to hunt you up if we did not mean business."

"Oh, but I say, this idea is so utterly ridiculous, you know!" the young Englishman protested, evidently very much annoyed, but apparently not at all alarmed.

"Oh, no, it isn't!" the official retorted. "And you will find out that it isn't before you get through with the affair."

"Now, my dear sir, will you have the kindness to listen to reason? How on earth could I possibly get hold of these valuables?" Somerset exclaimed.

"Miss Lecount gave them to you, I suppose," the police captain remarked, dryly, with the idea of taking all the bravado out of the young actor at a single stroke.

"Eh? What on earth do you mean? Bless me! I am sure I cannot comprehend what you are driving at!" the young actor cried, so dumfounded by the unexpected announcement that he hardly knew what he was saying.

"Why, it is as plain as A, B, C!" Captain Constantine declared.

"You and Miss Lecount are extra good friends, you are broke and need money, so she set to work to help you out. She took the bonds and the shares out of the safe, then gave them to you, and it was on the understanding between you two that you was to get her an engagement to go on the stage with the company you are going to travel with," the police captain explained, a smile of triumph illuminating his fat face as he made the revelation.

"Ah! a light breaks in upon me!" Somerset exclaimed. And then he indulged in a hearty laugh, much to the surprise of his visitors.

"My dear sirs, you are very smart; men in your thief-taking line I have no doubt, but in this case you have made the biggest kind of a mistake, and I can understand, too, just exactly how you came to be led into the error," he continued.

"Oh, yes, of course, Detective McGarragh and I are just the kind of men who are liable to make all sorts of mistakes!" the police captain declared in a very sarcastic way.

"But go on with your bird's eggging! I think from what you say that you imagine you can explain this matter to our satisfaction, but I am so sure I haven't made any mistake about this matter that I would be willing to bet a

thousand dollars to a Florida orange that I am right."

"My dear sir, you would be very rash to make such a wager for you would certainly lose!" the young actor declared.

"But, as I said, I understand how the mistake occurred," he continued. "I did call upon Miss Lecount, and evidently some poor wretch, who had nothing better to do, was mean enough to play the listener, but from the circumstances of the case, I am sure it was not possible for the party to overhear all we said, and so this mistake occurred."

"The listener jumped to an unwonted conclusion."

"I am short of money I must admit, and when Miss Lecount learned how I was situated, in the kindest possible manner, she loaned me twenty dollars, and she did request me to get her a position in the company I am about to join, and that is all there is to the matter."

"As for the bonds and shares it is absurd to think that the young lady would rob her own father, and equally ridiculous to imagine—even if such an impossible thing as that could be true—that I would be idiot enough to lend myself to any such vile scheme!"

There was the ring of honest indignation in the voice of the young actor as he spoke, but it fell upon deaf ears.

The police captain and the detective were both so sure they were right in their suspicion that neither one paid the least attention to the young Englishman's words.

"It is all right, of course; it is your game to keep a stiff upper lip and deny everything!" the police captain declared with a sneer. "But we do not take any stock in your words!"

"We have a warrant here for your arrest, and another warrant—a search-warrant—empowering us to hunt through your apartment here for the valuables!" the detective remarked, producing two legal-looking documents.

"My dear sirs, I am quite ready to go with you, and as far as searching this apartment goes I haven't any objection," Somerset replied in the most confident manner possible.

"Oh, you don't mind our searching then?" the police captain asked, considerably astonished by the willingness of the young actor to submit to such a disagreeable process.

"Not at all!" Somerset replied, decidedly. "Warrant or no warrant, I am agreeable!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ACTOR IS SURPRISED.

THE police captain and the detective looked at the young actor in astonishment and then they gazed at each other in a questioning way.

The indifference of the young man was a source of great surprise to them.

"Ah, come now, you are trying to give us a big bluff!" McGarragh exclaimed.

"It will not work, young feller, it will not work, I can tell you that!" Captain Constantine declared.

"If you think you can pull the wool over our eyes and get us not to search the room because you pretend that you don't care whether we do or not, you have made the biggest kind of a mistake."

"Oh, no, I am not trying to do anything of the sort and it is you two who make the mistake when you run away with the idea that I am up to any trick of the kind," the young actor retorted.

"And as a proof that I speak the truth, here is the key of my trunk, so fire away as soon as you like!"

And as he spoke Somerset produced a trunk key and tendered it to the police captain.

"Well, you have got lots of nerve anyhow," the official commented.

Then McGarragh took a chair and sat down in front of the door, so as to guard against the prisoner making his escape by a sudden rush, while Captain Constantine proceeded to search the trunk.

In a careful, methodical way the official conducted the examination, but it was without results until the bottom of the trunk was reached, all the contents being piled on the floor.

"You have not found what you expected?" the young actor remarked, in a sarcastic tone.

"I am not through with the search yet," the police captain replied, he having caught sight of a tear in the paper lining at the bottom of the trunk, and it seemed to him as if something was concealed between the paper and the board.

His eyes had not deceived him.

There were two carefully-folded papers in the crevice.

With an air of triumph Captain Constantine drew them out and held them aloft.

"Now then, you gay young English duffer, what do you call these, hey?" he cried, exultingly.

"Eh?" cried Somerset, staring at the papers in complete astonishment.

"Here are the two railroad certificates, the Michigan Central, and the Chicago and Northwestern," and Captain Constantine flourished them triumphantly before the amazed eyes of the young Englishman.

"Found concealed in the bottom of your trunk, you understand!" the police captain con-

tinued. "But, of course, you don't know anything about the matter."

"Of course not!" the detective added.

And then both of them grinned at the astonished Somerset.

"Yes, you are right, I don't know anything about it!" the young actor exclaimed, who, although he was very much surprised, was not at all dismayed.

"Well, well, you don't mean to say that you are going to try and brazen the thing out now—after I have got you dead to rights?" Captain Constantine exclaimed, about as astonished now as the young actor.

"Say, young feller, I think you have got the biggest gall of any man I ever struck!" McGarragh declared, equally as amazed as his chief.

"Well, gentlemen, I do not blame you for thinking that you have got me in an extremely tight place, and if I was situated as you are I do not doubt I should think just as you do," Somerset remarked, by this time recovering somewhat from his surprise, but still not manifesting the slightest signs of alarm, a circumstance which puzzled the intruders greatly.

"But, gentlemen, I must declare that, no matter how strong the evidence seems to be against me, I know absolutely nothing about the matter!"

"Oh, come now, come down!" the police captain exclaimed. "What is the use of your trying any game of this kind when we have found the boodle right in your trunk?"

"I can't deny the truth of that assertion, but, notwithstanding the fact, I must protest that I did not put the articles there, and have no more knowledge of how they came to be in my trunk than either of you two!" the young actor exclaimed, emphatically.

The pair of thief-catchers exchanged looks of disgust.

"Well, young feller, you beat the deck, and no mistake!" Captain Constantine exclaimed.

"You are a corker!" the detective asserted.

"Nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand when caught in a fix of this kind would throw up the sponge and cry for mercy!" the police captain declared.

"Well, I must be the odd and peculiar one out of the thousand then for I am not going to do anything of the kind!" Somerset replied, firmly.

"If I admitted knowing anything about these papers I should not be speaking the truth, for I do not," the young actor continued.

"You don't mean to say that you are going to stick to that bluff?" the police captain exclaimed, profoundly astonished.

"I am going to stick to the truth," Somerset replied with firm determination.

"I never saw those papers before in my life, and I have no more idea how they came in my trunk than you have, and if you should pursue this examination for the next ten years I should not say anything else!"

"Well, all I have got to remark is that you have got the biggest cheek of any man I ever struck!" the police captain declared in a tone which plainly showed how disgusted he was by the obstinacy of the young actor.

"Young feller, if you were sensible, and knew when you was well off, you would chuck your hand up right now!" McGarragh exclaimed, fully as much annoyed as his superior at the willfulness of the man.

"Gentlemen, I have made my statement, and I can assure you that I intend to stick to it," Somerset responded with a great deal of dignity.

"Then I suppose it will not be of any use for me to ask you what you have done with the bonds?" the police captain demanded.

"Not a bit! I do not know anything about any bonds! I don't suppose you will believe me, and so you had better proceed to search the apartment as thoroughly as you did the trunk," Somerset suggested. "You succeeded in finding what I did not know to be in the trunk, and if you look diligently perhaps you will be able to find the bonds."

"As far as I am concerned," the young actor continued with an air of resignation, "I should not be surprised at anything that you may discover in this room now!"

"You will save trouble though if you will give up the bonds so I will not have to hunt for them," Captain Constantine remarked in a coaxing way.

"My dear sir, I cannot give up what I haven't got!" Somerset responded, coolly.

"Well, I will have to see what I can do then."

And thorough indeed was the search that the police captain made, but no bonds could he discover.

At the beginning he was under the impression that the bonds were not in the room.

There were thirty of them, each bond being a five hundred dollar one, and so they would make quite a bulky parcel—one not easily concealed.

Captain Constantine had wound up the search by carefully examining the clothes which he had taken out of the trunk, placing them back again in their former position.

"You have got the best of me in this little game!" he declared at last, satisfied that it was a waste of time for him to search longer.

"I don't suppose it is of any use to urge you to make a clean breast of it," the police captain added.

"My dear sir, all I can do is to declare that it is fully as great a mystery to me as it is to you," the young actor responded in his cool matter-of-fact way.

"I suppose, captain, that I had better take him to the Tombs?" McGarragh remarked, rising.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"If you will give me your word, Mr. Somerset, that you will not attempt to escape, I will not put the bracelets on you," the detective remarked, and he drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and dangled them before the eyes of the young actor as he spoke.

"I really would be very much obliged to you if you could arrange the matter in that way, for I have never been in any trouble in my life, and I should hate to walk through the streets ornamented with a pair of handcuffs," Somerset replied.

"I give you my word of honor that I will not attempt to escape," he continued.

"There really isn't any reason why I should try to bolt," he argued. "Because I am not guilty of any crime, notwithstanding the fact that the deuced railway shares were found in my trunk."

"But that is a very old dodge, you know. I have heard of the trick being played a dozen times. One man steals the articles, and then pops them into another man's trunk, so as to get the owner into trouble."

"Ah, yes, that is a very good story!" the police captain declared, incredulously.

"Now, who do you suppose would set out to work a trick of that kind on you, and what could anybody gain by doing it?"

"Don't ask me any conundrums, I beg!" Somerset exclaimed. "I never was good at riddles. All I can tell you about the matter is that I never saw those bits of paper in my life, and most assuredly, I did not hide them away in the trunk."

"Well, I must rise to remark that this is a very mysterious affair," Captain Constantine said, pretending to be cogitating deeply.

"I should smile!" exclaimed the detective, in an extremely knowing manner.

"My dear sirs, in my opinion it is one of the strangest affairs that I have ever heard of, and the more I think about it the greater to me becomes the puzzle," Somerset declared.

"And a woman being mixed up in the case makes it rather awkward, too," said the police captain.

"Very awkward!" McGarragh assented.

"Mac, I have got an idea!" Captain Constantine declared, abruptly.

"What is it?"

"Suppose that instead of taking Mr. Somerset to the Tombs you carry him to a hotel, while I go and see what Miss Lecount has to say for herself about the matter," the official suggested.

"I think that is a good idea!" the detective declared.

"She will tell you that I spoke the truth in regard to my interview with her," the actor remarked.

"Well, it will not do any harm for me to see her, and have a talk about this matter. Perhaps the affair can be settled in some way," the police captain remarked.

"Both Mac and I are reasonable men, and we are not anxious to get anybody in trouble, if it can be avoided; so, if you will go with the detective to a hotel, I will call upon Miss Lecount, and explain matters."

"Very well," Somerset replied.

Five minutes later the three were in the street and on their way.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE POLICE CAPTAIN AND THE HEIRESS.

THE three proceeded up-town to one of the hotels in the neighborhood of the Grand Central Depot, which was only about ten minutes' walk from the Lecount mansion, and there Detective McGarragh took a room for himself and Somerset.

"I will be back as soon as I can, but I have no idea that I will be detained long, for I think a speedy settlement will be reached," Captain Constantine remarked, as he parted from the others.

The police captain went up Madison avenue at a brisk pace.

He felt in the best of spirits, for he was certain that victory was within his grasp, and so could not resist the impulse to put his thoughts into words.

"Really now, when this thing comes to be examined I think almost anybody would have to admit that this is a mighty smart piece of detective work," the police captain remarked, complacently.

"Extremely quick work, too, I can tell you!" he continued, taking a deal of pleasure in this self-glorification.

"But though I got the man, and the railroad shares all right, I didn't succeed in finding the bonds."

"Now, how is that?" And then the official fell to meditating.

"Has this actor been able to dispose of the bonds so quickly?"

"No, no, it does not seem to be possible," he continued, after thinking over the matter for a few moments.

"He might have had the bonds concealed on his person, for I did not happen to think of searching him, but I don't think it is likely, though."

"Now, then, comes the question—has the man ever had the bonds at all?"

For fully a block the police captain proceeded in silence, pondering upon this matter, then he shook his head.

"I don't believe he ever had the bonds!" he declared.

"The minister's daughter was too sharp to trust him with the valuables," he continued.

"These actors are a slippery lot of customers, anyway, and I have no doubt the girl was afraid that if the man got fifteen thousand dollars' worth of United States bonds in his possession he might take it into his head to try the vanishing act—skip off to parts unknown, and leave her in the lurch to whistle for her money."

"She was sharp enough to keep the bonds in her own hands!"

"Yes, yes, there isn't any doubt about it, and that is why she took the matter so coolly when the loss of the valuables was discovered."

"No wonder that she did not feel worried about the matter when she had the bundle snugly hidden away, and by her father's death suddenly came in possession of all the property."

"I think the game was for her to elope with the actor, for, of course, she knew that a man like her father would never consent to her marrying a stage-player."

By this time the police captain was in sight of the Lecount mansion and he could not help indulging in a chuckle full of satisfaction.

"Aha! there you are!" he exclaimed. "I hope the young lady is at home so I can settle the matter right off."

"Unless I have made the biggest kind of a mistake it will not take me long to convince her that the easiest way to settle this affair will be to fork over a thousand dollars to, yours truly!" and there was a broad grin on the face of the official as he spoke, so certain did he feel that success was within his grasp.

Miss Lecount was at home, and when the police captain sent word that he wished to speak with her on important business, she had him shown into the drawing-room where she was ready to receive him.

The police captain bowed with extra politeness upon making his entrance, and expressed the hope that the lady was in good health.

"I am quite well, thank you," Mignon replied, with a stately bow.

"Pray be seated," she continued. "You wished to see me upon a matter of business, I believe?"

The reception was so cold that the police captain was angered, but he consoled himself with the thought that he would be speedily enabled to take some of the airs out of her, as he would have expressed it had he put his thoughts into words.

Mignon seated herself after speaking, and the captain followed her example.

"I went right to work on this robbery case, Miss Lecount, and I am happy to say I have succeeded in arresting the man who committed the crime; but, although I have managed to recover the railroad shares, I have not found the bonds; but I think I have a pretty good idea as to where the bonds are."

Mignon's astonishment was plainly visible in her face.

She had a very poor opinion of the official, and this speedy work amazed her, for she did not believe he would be able to do anything with the case.

"Here are the shares, miss," Captain Constantine continued, handing the stock certificates to her.

Mignon saw at a glance that the papers were the ones which had been taken from the safe.

"I am surprised that you have accomplished the work so quickly, captain," the girl remarked, laying the shares on the table by her side as she spoke.

"Oh, well, when I undertake a task, I don't usually allow the grass to grow under my feet," Captain Constantine remarked, complacently.

"And I have got the man all right, too, in addition to the shares, as I said, but as there are some peculiar circumstances connected with this case, I did not deem it wise to allow the newspaper fellows to get hold of it, and so instead of taking my prisoner to Police Headquarters, or to the Tombs, I had Detective McGarragh proceed with him to a hotel."

"That was to give me an opportunity to visit you in reference to the matter," he explained.

Captain Constantine was watching the face of the girl closely as he spoke, and he was surprised at not being able to detect any signs of agitation or embarrassment.

The look of surprise, which the production of the certificates caused, had passed away, and

now she did not appear to be particularly interested in the matter.

"Decidedly, you ought to go upon the stage," thought the official, "for you are almost as good an actress as I ever saw, either on the boards or off."

"What do you wish me to do—appear and prosecute the man, I suppose?" Mignon asked.

"Well, I was in considerable doubt in regard to the matter," the police captain observed, slowly.

"You see, I wasn't sure that you would care to appear against the man, as he is a friend of yours, and that is the reason I had him taken to the hotel, so as to keep the matter quiet."

"A friend of mine?" exclaimed Mignon in profound astonishment.

"Yes, his name is Edgar Somerset, and he is a young English actor."

The amazement of the girl appeared to increase, but there were no signs of embarrassment, such as the police captain had confidently expected to see.

"There must be some mistake about this matter!" Mignon exclaimed.

"You surely do not mean to say that you have arrested Mr. Somerset on the suspicion that he committed this robbery?"

"That is just exactly what I have done, miss!"

"Oh, but the idea is ridiculous!" the girl exclaimed. "Such a thing is utterly impossible! I know Mr. Somerset very well; he is an English gentleman, for although he is an actor, yet he comes of an extra good family; the sort of man who would rather die than to descend to the level of a thief."

"Oh, he is a nice fellow enough, I am not saying anything against him as far as that goes," the police captain replied, carelessly.

"But the best of fellows will get into trouble sometimes, and that I haven't made any mistake about arresting this Somerset is proved by the fact that I got these stolen certificates from him."

"I am utterly astounded!" Mignon declared.

"Do you really mean to say that you found these railroad shares on his person?"

"Well, no, not exactly on his person, but in his possession, for they were concealed in his trunk."

"The paper lying at the bottom was loose and he had slipped the papers under it," Captain Constantine explained.

"Oh, in his trunk!" exclaimed the girl, drawing a long breath, and apparently very much relieved.

"Yes, it is just the same, you know."

"Oh, no, it isn't!" Mignon declared, promptly. "I know enough about the law to understand how widely different the two things are."

"If valuables are found on a man's person it is almost positive proof that he was aware that they were there, but things can be easily concealed in a man's trunk without his knowledge."

"I reckon the smartest lawyer would have a hard time in getting a jury to believe anything of that kind!" the police captain exclaimed, decidedly nettled by the coolness which the girl displayed.

"Oh, no; a trick of that kind, to implicate an innocent man, has been tried many times and, as a rule, it generally fails."

"And now, Captain Constantine, will you have the kindness to explain to me how it was that you came to suspect Mr. Somerset, and what led you to search his apartment?" the girl asked, abruptly.

This speech afforded the official the opportunity he desired.

He was anxious to tell the girl that he was up to her tricks, and was not to be deceived, no matter how skillfully she might play the game.

"Well, miss, since you ask the question, I suppose I may as well tell you the truth, and then you will see that I am well posted," he replied.

"I got the tip about Somerset from a party who overheard the conversation between you and the actor right in this very room."

"Oh, our conversation was overheard, then?" Mignon remarked in a very quiet way, but there was a peculiar look in her clear eyes.

"Yes, miss, every word of it; and the party related it all to me."

"Well, was there any particular harm in what we said?" the girl asked calmly, and much to the amazement of the police captain.

"I reckon your father wouldn't have liked it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, come, miss, what is the use of beating around the bush?" Captain Constantine exclaimed, impatiently.

"You know very well that at that meeting you arranged to go off with Somerset, and planned to help yourself to your father's valuables so as to have money for the trip."

"And the spy who played the listener told you this?"

"Yes; and I, acting immediately on the information, put the collar on Somerset, and so captured the railroad shares."

"The bonds I didn't get, because you didn't give them to the actor, and there is where you were wise, for he might have skipped with them."

Mignon laughed outright in the face of the police captain, much to his astonishment.

"Captain Constantine, you have been completely fooled!" she declared.

CHAPTER XX.

EXPOSING THE TRICK.

"Eh? what do you mean? How have I been fooled?" the police captain exclaimed, decidedly annoyed by the words.

"This story told you by the spy is a falsehood from beginning to end, with the single exception that I did have an interview with Mr. Somerset in this room. That is the only bit of truth in the recital."

"Miss, you will have to excuse me if I say to you that you are making a big mistake in trying to throw me off the track by denying the thing, for the game will not work!" Captain Constantine declared in a dogged way.

"Let me give you proof that the story is a falsehood," Mignon remarked disdainfully. "The interview took place in this room. The doors were all closed, just exactly as they are now," she continued.

"You can easily see there is no chance for any one to conceal themselves in the apartment, and you should understand that if we conversed in an ordinary tone of voice, as we certainly did, our words could not be overheard by any one in the entry, and if any such conversation, as your spy relates passed between us, it is sure that we would be careful to speak in a low tone."

"But don't accept my statement without satisfying yourself that it is correct!" Mignon continued in a contemptuous tone.

"Examine the room thoroughly, then take a look at the doors, go out into the entry; I will speak in my ordinary voice, and if you can distinguish a single word I say I will be very much surprised."

The police captain was amazed by this bold challenge, but being thus put upon his metal he was provoked into making the examination.

The house was a magnificent mansion, constructed in the best manner, and without regard to cost, walls and doors were solid, none of your flimsy modern style of building about them, and the officer found that when he stood in the entry, with the door closed, it was not possible for him to distinguish a word that Miss Lecount said; all he could do, by listening intently at the keyhole, was to make out she was speaking.

Captain Constantine re-entered the room with a puzzled expression upon his face.

"My statement is correct?" Mignon asked.

"It certainly doesn't seem as if any one could have overheard the conversation," he remarked as he resumed his seat. "But how do you get over the fact that the information was correct in regard to the railroad shares being in Somerset's possession?"

"Do you remember the old adage that those who hide can also find?" the girl inquired.

"Yes; but it is a mighty strange thing!"

"Oh, no; it is a part of a skillfully-devised plot to divert suspicion from the men who really committed the robbery."

"Captain, I am usually regarded as being rather sharp-witted, and any one who thinks to get the best of me must play a good game," Mignon continued, fixing her clear eyes full on the face of the official.

"You, I presume, have no suspicion that I am aware of your attempt to buy the boy, Danny, to play the spy upon me?"

The official grew red in the face and said, in considerable confusion:

"Well, under the circumstances, I thought it would not do any harm for me to know who your visitors were."

"I judged from your manner, right in the beginning, that you had the idea there was something wrong about my father's death, and that I was connected with it in some way," Mignon remarked in a slightly sarcastic tone.

"I was groping in the dark, of course," the police captain admitted, feeling decidedly uncomfortable.

"After taking your money the boy's conscience troubled him, and he confessed to me. I reproved him, but gave instructions for him to go on and make the report as you desired, for it mattered not to me. But now, captain, as I am anxious to solve this mystery, I will ask you to inform me who it was that pretended to play the spy upon my interview with Mr. Somerset?"

"Why, it was the boy, Danny—or, that is, I suppose it was, for an old woman, closely veiled, his mother I presume, sent word for me to meet her in the neighborhood of the station-house, and she told me the story, which, of course, I imagined came straight from him, for the woman knew all about my giving him the five dollars."

"Your talk with the boy in the entry could easily have been overheard by any one on the landing above, so it is not much of a wonder that the circumstance should be known," Mignon remarked, thoughtfully.

"But the information you received did not come from Danny, for you had not been gone ten minutes when the boy came to me and made his confession."

"Maybe the young rascal played a double

game," the police captain suggested, completely bewildered.

"Oh, no, the boy is not smart enough to do that. And then another point, Danny hasn't a mother; he is an orphan—an English boy without a relative in this country, and then too, when he made his confession, I asked him if he had told any one about the matter, and upon his replying in the negative I cautioned him not to say a word about the affair to any one.

"But we will examine him, and be sure."

So Mignon rung the bell, and when Danny answered it he was put through a regular cross-examination.

He was extremely embarrassed, realizing that he was in an unpleasant position, but confirmed all that Miss Lecount had said.

After he was dismissed, Mignon asked:

"Are you satisfied now that you have been tricked?"

Bull-headed and obstinate as was the police captain, yet, under the circumstances, he was obliged to admit that it certainly appeared as if he had been deceived into making a mistake.

"I must say though that it is the most mixed-up piece of business that I ever had any thing to do with in all my experience!" he declared in conclusion.

"I think I can unravel the mystery in time," the girl remarked.

"It is a deep plot, very skillfully planned, and carried out in a most excellent manner; but owing to circumstances, which it was impossible for the plotters to foresee, and guard against, it has not worked as the contrivers of the scheme intended it should."

"Perhaps you are able to get at the rights of the thing but I am blessed if I can!" the police captain exclaimed, bluntly.

"In a few words I can explain to you the nature of the scheme, I think," the girl remarked in a thoughtful way.

"In the first place, there is a dishonest person in this house," she continued. "Of that fact I am certain, although at present I am utterly in the dark as to who it is."

"They are a good-looking lot," Captain Constantine observed.

"I wasn't able to pick out a single one who looked at all suspicious."

"There is a crooked one among them for all of that," Mignon rejoined. "And this one, man or woman, got the idea that there were valuables in my father's safe."

"It is possible, you know, that at some time when my father had the safe open—or perhaps had the bonds out on the table for the purpose of cutting off the coupons, this party, through the keyhole of the door, ascertained that he had the bonds."

"Oh, yes, a trick of this kind could be worked easily enough."

"I think that it is very probable indeed that the party knew the bonds were in the safe, although I was ignorant of the fact, but then I never had any curiosity in regard to anything of the kind, and my father was a man who seldom spoke of his worldly possessions."

"Knowing that the bonds were in the safe, this spy plotted with confederates to steal them."

"The robbery was performed, and with the bonds went the two railroad shares, although if the thieves were the skillful and experienced men that I believe them to be, they knew well enough that it would be a difficult matter to get any money on the shares."

"That is true enough, but why were they taken?" asked the police captain, perplexed.

"In order to cover up the track of the thieves, by throwing suspicion on me," Mignon explained.

"The rogue who was in the house knew that I was acquainted with Mr. Somerset, and it was not a difficult matter for the rascals to find out all about him, then the stolen railway shares were hidden in his trunk, and the veiled woman put you on the track by accusing me."

"The supposition was that you would take your prisoner right to court, then the affair would get into the newspapers, and my reputation would be affected, for the rogues knew I would not prosecute Mr. Somerset."

"By throwing up this cloud of dust they hoped to cover up their own tracks."

"Your idea of conveying the prisoner to a hotel, and then waiting upon me in regard to the matter, was something which they did not anticipate."

"Well, I always try to be as easy and agreeable in a case of this kind as I can," the police captain said with the air of a man conferring a favor.

The lip of the girl curled slightly.

She was not deceived by the official's words, for she understood perfectly well the kind of game he had hoped to play.

"I am much obliged to you, captain, for your thoughtful consideration," she remarked with a peculiar smile which made the worthy police officer feel uncomfortable.

"The rascals planned exceedingly well, but they made the mistake which is common to all these extra-smart schemers—they overdid the thing, and so I think there is a good chance that I will be able to have them caught."

"If I can be of any help I shall be pleased to assist you!" the police captain declared with a polite bow.

"I am much obliged, captain, but I have employed a most renowned thief-catcher to take charge of the case, Joseph Phenix."

"Ah, Joe Phenix, eh? One of the ablest men in the business!"

"He is to put one of his best specials on the affair, a rather mysterious personage who is known as Joe Phenix's Unknown."

"Yes, yes, I have heard of his specials, and they usually do good work. Well, I don't doubt that they will be able to run this Crook Combination to earth."

"You have been to some trouble—possibly expense," Mignon remarked, taking out her pocketbook.

"Will a hundred dollars be sufficient for your trouble?" and as she spoke she tendered five twenty dollar bills.

"Quite sufficient, thank you!" replied the captain with a grateful bow, for he had not expected to get anything out of the affair. "Detective McGarragh has gone to considerable expense, I believe, but this will cover it."

Then the captain rose.

"I will explain to Mr. Somerset that the matter has been explained and release him."

"Request him to come here, please, immediately!"

"Certainly! with great pleasure!" And then the police captain departed.

CHAPTER XXI.

PHENIX TAKES THE CASE.

"WELL, well, I have come out a deuced sight better than I expected," the police captain muttered, as he descended the steps of the Lecount mansion.

"That girl is as sharp as a razor, and when she showed me that I wasn't in it at all, I made up my mind there was no chance for either Mac or myself to see the color of her money."

"But she is square all the way through, and a hundred will pay McGarragh and myself very well for our trouble."

"I reckon, though, that as I have done all the head-work of this business, that I will be doing the proper thing by Mac if I give out that the girl gave up fifty. That will be twenty-five for him, and he ought to be mighty thankful to get it, too, for if the girl hadn't wanted to give it we couldn't have collared a cent, for it is evident that she is one of the kind of women who don't care a rap for the newspapers, and she couldn't be worried in that way."

As the officer walked down the street he encountered an old, gray-haired gentleman, dressed in sober black, who had a very ministerial look, and as the old gentleman appeared to be in search of a certain number, the police captain at once jumped to the conclusion that he was a country parson bound for the Lecount mansion, so, out of pure curiosity, he kept his eyes on the stranger.

As he expected, the old gentleman ascended the steps of the minister's house.

"I thought I hadn't made a mistake," the police captain remarked, in his complacent, egotistical way.

"A man who is a judge of that sort of thing can pick out these country parsons, when they come to the city, without any trouble."

"The cut of their jib is what gets a man onto them!"

But notwithstanding the fact that the boasting police captain felt so sure that he had rightly identified the stranger, he was altogether wrong, for the clerical-looking old gentleman was the man-hunter, Joe Phenix, who had assumed this disguise, so that he could not be recognized, going on his old idea of never allowing anybody to know that he had taken up any particular case if he could possibly avoid it.

In this instance his disguise was so perfect as to completely deceive the police captain who was well acquainted with the veteran detective, so Captain Constantine went on his way without the slightest suspicion that the most indefatigable bloodhound in the country was about to try his hand at solving the mystery which had been such a complete puzzle to him.

To the servant, who answered his ring, the disguised detective said that an old friend of Mr. Lecount would like to see Miss Lecount.

When the message was brought to Mignon it found her up-stairs in the study, and she directed that the gentleman should be shown up.

As soon as he crossed the threshold the disguised detective made a low bow and:

"As an old friend of your father, miss, I have taken the liberty of calling upon you, and I trust you will pardon the intrusion."

This was for the benefit of the servant who was retracing his steps down the stairs.

Then the detective closed the door.

Mignon had risen as the supposed stranger entered, and as he closed the door she replied:

"Any friend of my father is always welcome!" and then as the disguised detective turned she got a good view of his face, the light from the chandelier in the center of the room falling full upon it.

"Oh, I really didn't know you and thought you were a stranger!" she exclaimed, her quick eyes penetrating his disguise.

Joe Phenix smiled as he replied:

"From what you said in your note I got the notion that you had an extra difficult case here, and so I thought it wise to take all possible precautions."

"I did not receive your message until late this afternoon, as I was out of town, but I came as soon as I could," he continued.

"I am glad enough to see you, Mr. Phenix, you can rest assured of that," the girl declared. "Pray be seated."

Phenix took a chair and the girl resumed her seat.

"I suppose we can speak without danger of being overheard?" he remarked.

"I will take care there shall be no doubt about that—excuse me for a moment," she answered.

Joe Phenix bowed assent.

Then Mignon passed into her father's bedroom and locked the door leading into the entry, then she saw that the door of the room itself was tightly closed.

"There, now we can speak freely," she said as she again sat down.

"It is necessary in this case to use extra precaution," she continued, "for I am satisfied there is a spy in the house, and the party will be on the alert to watch all my visitors."

"It was fortunate, then, that I took the precaution of coming in disguise."

"Yes, for this is a difficult case and it will not do to give away a single point in the game."

And then Mignon related all the particulars of the robbery, and wound up with a full recital of the part which Captain Constantine had taken in the affair.

Joe Phenix laughed.

"The captain was up to his old tricks, I see. There are, unfortunately, a few men of his stamp on the police force of all great cities, and when a case of this kind comes up, the first thing these men do is to try and ascertain if there isn't a chance for them to make some money out of it," the detective remarked, and from the way in which he spoke it was plain that he had an extremely poor opinion of the police captain.

"Is that the safe yonder?" Joe Phenix asked.

"It is."

"Found locked in the morning, and without anything to show that a forcible entry had been made?" the detective remarked in a meditative way.

"Yes, not a mark on the safe to denote that it had been tampered with."

Then Joe Phenix made a careful examination of the article.

"It is one of the old style," he commented. "And I have heard boasts made by expert crooks, who made a specialty of bank robbing, that it was a possible thing for certain expert workmen in that line to open one of these safes without having to use tools."

"The man turned the knob, and, by listening to the workings of the machinery was able to detect how the combination was set."

"It seems like a fairy-tale, but I believe the trick has been done," he continued.

"There are a few of these bank-robbing crooks who are wonderfully skillful workmen, and I have no doubt the story is a true one; so, if a genius of this kind had a hand in this affair it would explain how the rogues contrived to get at the valuables in the safe without having to resort to violence."

"Yes; that would explain that mystery, and now comes another puzzle," Mignon remarked.

"How did they contrive to gain admission to this room?"

"In the morning, when you were alarmed by your father's absence, you forced in the door of his bedroom, and then from his room came into this one?"

"Yes."

"And this door was locked?"

And the detective pointed to the one by which he had entered.

"Securely locked."

"And the key in the lock, as it is now?"

"Just the same."

"And the bolt?"

"It was not bolted."

"An expert house-breaker would not have any trouble then in opening the door from the outside with a pair of nippers," the detective remarked. "Nor in locking it, either, after he got through."

"Sometimes, too, the marks of the nippers on the end of the key can be detected; so we will take a look and see if we can find anything of the kind."

Joe Phenix took the key from the door and brought it to the center-table, where the rays of the light could shine full upon it.

"Ah, yes!" he exclaimed, as he held up the key, "there are the marks, plain enough, where the nippers have scraped the brass."

Mignon saw the signs without any trouble.

"Why, this detective, McGarragh, must be a regular chump, as the boys say!" the girl exclaimed, in disdain.

"The idea of a man pretending to be a detective, and yet not having sense enough to guess that the thieves might have been able to get

into the room in this way," the girl continued.

"As a detective the man does not amount to anything at all," Joe Phenix answered.

"I know all about him—have known him for years; he was a good enough policeman, but when they made a detective out of him they made a mistake.

"The trouble with both him and his captain is that they have an attack of the big head, and flatter themselves that they know a great deal more than they really do, so when they get hold of a case of this kind, instead of making a careful examination, and refraining from forming an opinion until they have some good, solid ground to go upon, they immediately jump to a conclusion, right in the beginning, as to how the game was worked and then proceed to warp the facts to suit their theory."

"That is exactly the way the pair went to work in this case!" Mignon declared.

"I could plainly see from their manner—really before they had time to make an examination—that they had a suspicion that I had a hand in my father's death, and when the doctor's examination showed that death had resulted from natural causes, and the discovery of the robbery came, then they immediately came to the conclusion that I must have had something to do with the matter.

"You see, having formed a bad opinion of me in the beginning they were determined to make out that I was guilty of something," the girl added, with a laugh.

"It is just as I said; the pair get an idea in their heads, and then allow it to run away with them.

"If they had gone to work in the proper manner they could soon have satisfied themselves that regular professional cracksmen had done the job.

"Still it is just as well as it is, for neither one of the pair have the brains to solve a problem of this kind, and they would only have made a botch of the task if they had attempted it."

"The scheme was carefully planned, and has been extremely well carried out, particularly the attempt to make it appear as if I had had a hand in it," the girl remarked.

"Yes, the idea of that was to divert suspicion from the real thieves, and then too it really appears as if the men who planned the scheme had some feeling against you, or otherwise they would not have taken so much trouble to arrange the matter so that when the exposure came your character would be blackened. It is the work of a man who desires to be revenged upon you."

CHAPTER XXII.

A CLEW.

MIGNON reflected over the matter for a few minutes, and then she said:

"You are right, it really does seem so.

"That idea did not occur to me," she continued.

"It was my calculation that the fellows had gone to this trouble simply to throw suspicion upon me, and so divert it from themselves."

"It is one of those cases, where, in order to get at the truth, a man must put himself in the place of the rascals as well as he is able, so as to say to himself, I must make such and such a move for such and such a purpose."

"I understand."

"Now then, to begin right at the real beginning, which was your father's death.

"The doctor had warned him against any sudden excitement, stating that a fatal result would be apt to follow.

"Death came. What caused that death? Heart-disease! Yes, but the doctor—one of the best in the city, which is, virtually saying, a man without a superior in the country—did not think there was any danger of death coming for months, years, possibly, as long as your father met with no sudden shock.

"Death did come, and I reason that a shock caused it. What was that shock?"

"My father was found lying dead in the room," Mignon remarked, thoughtfully.

"I have it! He surprised the villains when they were robbing the safe!" the girl exclaimed.

"Exactly, and from that came the shock which caused his death."

"By heavens! I will hunt the murderers down if it takes me to the end of my life!" Mignon exclaimed, springing to her feet, her eyes blazing with lurid fires, and every nerve in her body quivering with excitement.

"I am satisfied that this is the true story of how your father came to his death," Joe Phenix remarked. "And you can depend upon it that I shall do my best to bring the scoundrels to justice."

"I think we can get a clew!" Mignon declared, eagerly, resuming her seat as she spoke.

"The veiled woman who gave the information to the police captain regarding my interview with Mr. Somerset; he supposed she was Danny's mother, and that the boy had listened and overheard our conversation. This was an impossibility. Danny, too, has no mother, nor could he have given her any such information, or any other woman.

"I did lend Mr. Somerset money, and any information in regard to what passed between us could only come from either him or me."

"You have not spoken of the matter, of course, and so it follows that he must have confided the particulars to some one."

"Exactly, and that person was in communication with the crooks who planned this scheme."

"And so it naturally follows that if we can find out from him who it was he spoke to about the matter we may be able to get at the rascals," Joe Phenix observed.

"Yes, it certainly seems so!" Mignon declared.

"The schemers are smart enough, but they have made the mistake in this case which these extra-accomplished rogues usually make. They have carried the thing too far," the veteran detective remarked.

"In their anxiety to strike a blow at you they have given a clew which, if diligently followed up, may lead to their capture."

"Yes, that is exactly what I thought," Mignon remarked. "It is the old story of the cunning rogues over-reaching themselves."

"And now for the man, your enemy, who has striven to injure you by this carefully-planned scheme?" Joe Phenix observed.

"If Trevanion, that wretch who was once my husband, was alive, my thoughts would turn to him immediately," the girl replied in a thoughtful way.

"He is dead; so is also his partner in crime, the east-side ruffian who really did the bloody work; but the man whom I firmly believed to be the one who conceived the scheme is still alive, for I encountered him down in the Wall street district only a few days ago."

"The fellow who called himself Captain Gordon Murphy?"

"Yes, that is the man; and I believe him to be as dangerous a crook as ever crossed the ocean."

"I remember that he was very angry at his arrest, and when the news of Trevanion's death was brought to him he was fearfully enraged and swore he would be revenged upon me."

"He blamed you for the man's death."

"That is usually the way," Mignon said, contemptuously.

"Men of his class never take the trouble to consider that if they led honest lives no one could possibly do them any harm."

"Really I was not responsible for Trevanion's death. It was his own coward conscience that brought him to his end," the girl continued.

"If full justice had been done, though, he ought to have died by my hand, and if I had taken his miserable life, it would not have been the vengeance of a despairing woman, but the legal act of a lawful executioner."

"The miserable wretch came within a hair's breadth of wrecking my life, and it was through no fault of his that I did not sink beneath the sea of perdition and go down to my dark grave a guilty, despairing creature."

"Yes, that is the truth; you have not overdrawn the case in the least," the veteran detective declared.

"A man of the Trevanion stamp deserves no mercy; he should be hunted down like a wild beast."

"Yes, such men are worse than the brute beasts, for they cannot plead ignorance as an excuse for their misdeeds."

"This Captain Murphy is another one of the same class," Joe Phenix observed.

"In fact, he is really worse than Trevanion, for he is a more able man every way; possesses more brains and twice the courage," the detective continued.

"Trevanion was really a coward at heart, while this man, if he was cornered, would be apt to make a desperate fight."

"Your persecutor was his pal, he considers you responsible for his death and the chances are great, it seems to me, that he is at the bottom of this scheme which came within an ace of wrecking your reputation."

"I should not be surprised if you had hit upon the truth," Mignon observed, slowly and thoughtfully.

"He swore to be revenged upon me, and now he is doing his best to keep his word."

"A scheme of this kind is right in his way too."

"Oh, yes, he is an arch-plotter."

"I have always been satisfied that he was the man who devised the plot which brought death to the unfortunate English girl, and though, thanks to your aid, I succeeded in getting him behind the bars, yet the rascal managed the affair in such a cunning manner that I was not able to secure proof enough to warrant my bringing him to trial."

"I warned him then though that if he did not turn over a new leaf and abandon his evil ways, the time would come when I would certainly nail him so fast that he could not possibly get away."

"Ah, yes, but a man of that stamp laughs at warnings, for he escapes so often that he comes to believe he will never be caught."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the young English actor.

Mignon had him brought to the study, and then she introduced the detective as Mr. Black,

an old friend of her father, who had come to help her with his advice.

"Really, Miss Mignon, this is a most astonishing thing, you know!" Somerset declared.

"You have no suspicion as to how the shares came in your trunk?" Mignon asked.

"Certainly not! no more than a babe unborn!"

"Mr. Somerset, this is a very mysterious affair," the girl remarked. "And in order to get at the truth we must be careful how we proceed."

"Now then, in the first place, did you tell anybody of your interview with me and that I lent you money?"

"Yes, certainly, a couple of my chums at the boarding-house. Why, there wasn't any harm in it, was there?" the young Englishman asked in his innocent way.

"Oh, no," the girl replied, carelessly. "I was only curious, that was all."

"I didn't know you had any chums. I thought you were all alone in the country—a stranger," she continued.

"Oh, these are a couple of young fellows whose acquaintance I made on the steamer coming over, two brothers, you know, Randolph and Percy Howard."

"Jolly, nice fellows they are too, but I fancy they have been going at a rather fast pace at home, and so their kindred shipped them over here, and they are trying to get a chance in the theatrical line."

"Oh, they are actors then?" Mignon exclaimed.

"Well, no, not exactly actors—not regular professionals, you know."

"Amateurs, eh?" the girl remarked.

"Yes, and, really, as they haven't got any particular profession, I suppose they stand a chance to do about as well on the stage as in any other line."

"I suppose you are doing what you can to help them along?" Mignon suggested.

"Oh, yes; I take quite an interest in them for they are really jolly fellows, and then, like myself, they are not exactly living in Easy street just now."

"And on that account, I suppose, you could not resist telling them of the loan you got?" the girl remarked with a charming smile.

"Well, yes, I suppose that is just about it," the Englishman replied, considerably embarrassed.

"Really, you see, I know, now that I come to think the matter over, that I ought not to have mentioned the affair, but it popped out before I thought."

"It doesn't matter," Mignon replied, carelessly. "But be sure not to mention to any one that I was curious about the matter."

"Certainly not!"

"And now about this affair: if any one inquires, no matter who, you must say that I was satisfied you were innocent of any knowledge of the shares and that I wished the matter dropped, and that is all you are to say."

"Egad! that is all I know!"

"By the way, I shall not return to the stage, but I am going to send a young man to you, a relative of Mr. Black here, and I want you to do what you can to get him an engagement. He has had some experience in the West, but is a stranger in New York."

"I will be glad to oblige you!"

"But you are not to mention my name in the matter, not even to young Mr. James—his name by the way is Uriah."

"Of course, I shall be discretion itself!" the young actor declared.

"If you need any more money before starting out, don't hesitate to come to me."

"I hope I shall not need to trouble you but I am a thousand times obliged."

And then the young Englishman took his departure, feeling that a great weight had been taken off his mind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MIGNON'S SCHEME.

FOR a good five minutes there was silence in the room; Mignon's head was bowed upon her breast and she was busy in thought.

Joe Phenix watched her with a great deal of interest.

He guessed that she was meditating in regard to the situation.

The veteran detective had already made up his mind in regard to the matter and he was curious to see what conclusion the girl would reach.

Of all the agents whom he had ever employed—of all the men and women whom he had ever encountered, he took the most interest in this man-like girl.

She was such a strange creature—so utterly different from the usual run of womankind; as brave as a lion and as true as steel.

"I begin to think I have got the threads of this affair pretty well together in my mind," she said at last, lifting her head, and looking Joe Phenix full in the face with her clear, fearless eyes.

"There is considerable mystery about the affair, but it is like all other puzzles of the kind,

it can be solved if one is lucky enough to get a clew to begin on," the veteran remarked.

"To my thinking it is utterly out of the question to suppose that Mr. Somerset had anything to do with the affair."

"Yes, that is my opinion, also."

"I am well-acquainted with the man, Mignon explained. "I traveled with him in the same theatrical company in England for over six months, and being thus constantly in his society I came to know the man about as well as though I had been acquainted with him all my life."

"An association of that kind is apt to make the people well-acquainted with each other."

"He is no fool, but an intelligent, well-educated gentleman, though not at all gifted with worldly shrewdness, an honest, simple-hearted fellow, almost as guileless as a child, and it is not strange that such a man should believe these fellow-countrymen, whom he met on the steamer, to be young men of good families, but rather wild, coming to the United States to seek their fortunes; he had no suspicion that they were not exactly what they represented themselves to be."

"Yes, a man of that kind is apt to be deceived into accepting strangers at their own estimate."

"The two are a pair of rogues, of course; probably a couple of English crooks whose own country has become too hot to hold them, and so they crossed the water to try their luck in the New World."

"Exactly! I do not think you have made any mistake in that estimate," the veteran detective observed.

"And I do not doubt that they regarded it as a most fortunate chance in being able to get on intimate terms with the young actor, for by pretending that they intended to adopt the stage as a profession, it afforded them a convenient cloak."

"To these men, in his honest way, Somerset confided the fact that I had loaned him money, and they immediately saw this was a chance to bring discredit upon me," Mignon remarked.

"I could not deny that I had an interview with the gentleman, for there were plenty of witnesses to prove that I had, and so they contrived the story that during that interview I made arrangements with him to rob the safe."

"Yes, but there is a master-rascal back of the two Englishmen," Joe Phenix asserted.

"Ah, yes, no doubt about that, for the pair were strangers and could not possibly have known anything about me, and this, I presume, is where this Captain Murphy comes in."

"Yes, I think so. He is a transplanted rascal, you know," the detective remarked. "A European crook, and, probably, was well-acquainted with the English fellows on the other side of the water."

"That is correct, I imagine, and I do not doubt he has been planning to strike a blow at me ever since the time when he was put behind the bars, and came so near making a trip to State Prison."

"Very likely. He swore he would get even with you for the death of his pal, Trevanion, which he had laid at your door, and this is his attempt to keep his word."

"His first move was undoubtedly to get a spy into this house—for that there is some one in the mansion acting in that capacity I feel certain!" the girl declared.

"Yes, I do not think there is much doubt about the correctness of that statement," Joe Phenix observed, thoughtfully.

"There is an old saying, you know, that 'Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad,' Mignon remarked. "And, really, there is a wonderful deal of truth in it."

"Now look at this case," she continued. "This Crook Combination formed their plans in a very cunning manner, and displayed really wonderful skill in carrying them out."

"They located the fifteen thousand dollars' worth of bonds, then managed to gain admittance to the house, and robbed the safe in such a skillful way as to leave no trace of how the work was done, and, as far as I can see, the shrewdest detective in the world would have been greatly troubled to have got the slightest clew to them."

"You are right; it is the most skillfully-performed piece of work that ever came to my notice, and for a detective to apprehend the rascals would seem very much like a miracle."

"But this scoundrel, Murphy, was not satisfied with getting off scot free with the plunder—he wanted to strike a blow at me, and so he dragged the young actor into the scheme, and, thereby, laid himself and confederates open to detection."

"Yes, that is the truth; it was a stupid piece of work, and he was out of his senses to attempt it."

"He was anxious for a chance to be revenged upon me, so he took the risk, and now then, if he has recovered his senses, he will comprehend that in striving to deal me a blow he has exposed himself to one, therefore will be on the lookout to guard against it."

"Undoubtedly! you have got that all right. He knows now that you must understand that

the men who committed the robbery have managed in some way to get at the young Englishman, and it will be the most natural thing in the world for you to put detectives on the track to hunt up a clew."

"Oh, yes, there isn't any doubt that the crooks will be on the lookout for detectives," Mignon observed.

"And the spy who is here in the house, too, will be on the watch in order to ascertain if I have called for the assistance of any gentleman in that line."

"The spy will not be able to gain any information of value, I fancy," the veteran detective observed with a quiet smile.

"No, I shall not seek any detectives, nor will any gentlemen in that business come here to see me," Mignon replied.

"And if these Englishmen at the theatrical boarding-house, keep a good lookout so as to ascertain the moment a detective makes his appearance, it is my impression that they will only have their labor for their pains."

"It is true that in a day or two this young man whom I have recommended to Mr. Somerset's good offices—your relative, Mr. Uriah James, will probably take up his quarters in the house, but I will be bound that the sharpest and shrewdest of the Englishmen will not suspect there is anything out of the way about the young man."

"Uriah James, eh?" Joe Phenix said with a quizzical smile.

"Yes, you may say, Uriah Nathan James!" and Mignon laughed merrily.

"Why Uriah Nathan?"

"U. N. James—Unknown James, alias Joe Phenix's Unknown," the girl replied.

"Well, that name will do as well as any other."

"Now, then, we must try and see what moves this Crook Combination will be likely to make," Mignon remarked, thoughtfully.

"For the present they will not be likely to do much of anything—no movement will be made until they become satisfied that the detectives are not on their track."

"Well, unless I am greatly mistaken, they will not discover anything to alarm them."

"Then this Captain Murphy will probably set his wits to work to see if he can't get another blow at you, as the first one failed to do any damage."

"It is true he managed to get away with fifteen thousand dollars' worth of your property, but, as you have so much money you can afford to let that go, and really never miss it, he does not probably consider that he has damaged you materially."

"Your conclusion is exactly the same as the one at which I arrived," the girl remarked.

"I assume that he will plot and plan to get at me, and I think it would be good policy to lure him on all I can."

"Yes, that would be advisable, but how do you propose to do it?"

"An idea has just occurred to me," Mignon answered. "An idea which will appeal to his desire to be avenged upon me, and to his hunger for money—that craving for gold, without being obliged to work for it, which turns such men as he is into rascals."

"If you can succeed in touching him on those two points, the temptation will be well nigh irresistible," the veteran detective observed.

"I think I can do it without any trouble," Mignon remarked, confidently.

"Now then, just bear in mind my position: I am a young lady who has never been accustomed to the handling of much money, and here, in the most unexpected manner, I came in for a splendid fortune."

"What more natural, then, for me than to wish to cut a dash in the world when my mourning time expires?"

"Very natural, indeed!"

"And my fancy runs chiefly to diamonds," the girl added.

"Diamonds, eh?"

"Yes; the precious stones I can buy now, and though I cannot wear them at present, yet I can have them in my possession, and gloat over them, as many a fashionable dame does in her boudoir with some dear intimate friend to join in the admiration."

"It is a great scheme, and it goes to show that you have the making of a fine detective in you!" Joe Phenix declared.

"I will invest twenty thousand dollars in diamonds, and I will take care too that this spy, who is in the house, be it man or woman, will be aware that I am in possession of the jewels, and then is it likely that this arch-scoundrel will be tempted to try and rob me—thus at one blow satisfy both avarice and revenge?"

"Yes, I do not think there is a doubt about his being led into the trap," Joe Phenix declared.

"The temptation will be too strong for him to resist."

"The only danger is that he may suspect that it is a trap," the girl said, thoughtfully.

"I don't think there is much danger that he will be cunning enough to detect the plot."

"The only weak point in the scheme, as far as I can see, is that his suspicions may be excited that I am up to some trick when time passes and

he is not able to spot any detectives engaged on the case," Mignon remarked.

"Well, I don't know about that," Joe Phenix observed. "I think the chances are good that he will jump to the conclusion that you are trusting to the shrewdness of Captain Constantine and his detectives."

"He will think that you believe the captain and his men are doing all that possibly can be done, and so you have not troubled yourself to put other men on the track," the veteran continued.

"Well, it does not seem improbable that he might like that view of the matter," Mignon remarked.

"Then he will be apt to think too that the reason the captain and the ward detectives do not trouble themselves about the matter is because he planned the robbery in such a skillful way that Captain Constantine, and his men, have an idea that you were implicated in the affair," Joe Phenix observed.

"Yes, and I really think that is the truth too," the girl remarked.

"I don't doubt that in their hearts both the captain and the detective have a lurking suspicion that I have a guilty knowledge of the matter."

"Exactly! they are a pair of blunderheads, and when they start in on a case of this kind the chances are good that if it is possible for them to go on a false scent they will be pretty apt to do it."

"It is probable that Murphy has a good opinion of his own ability, and he will be likely to believe he has arranged the scheme in such a cunning manner that any one who takes the trouble to examine into the matter cannot help coming to the conclusion that you had a hand in the robbery," Joe Phenix continued.

"I believe your opinion in regard to the situation is correct," Mignon declared. "And if it is, the chances are good that we can trap this Captain Murphy, clever as he thinks himself."

"Yes, it looks that way to me. And now, I think it would be a good idea for me to take up my quarters here with you and see if I cannot detect who it is that is acting as Murphy's spy."

"Yes, the idea is a good one!" Mignon declared, immediately. "The thought came to me, and I was about to suggest it to you."

"I am a retired clergyman, an old friend of your father—college chum, in fact, and I have come to the city for the express purpose of spending a few weeks with him."

"I am from the far West, and under the circumstances, it is only natural for you to insist upon my accepting your hospitality for a time."

"Oh, yes, that will answer, I think," Mignon remarked. "I do not think there is danger of any one suspecting that it is not the truth."

"I will be enabled then to study all the people in the house at my leisure, and unless this spy is far more cunning than any one of the kind whom I have ever encountered, I will be able to spot the right party," the detective remarked.

"Oh, there isn't any doubt in my mind that you will accomplish the task without any trouble!" the girl declared, in a tone full of confidence.

And so the matter was settled.

Joe Phenix took up his abode in the Lecount mansion, a spy upon a spy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOMERSET EXPLAINS.

THE young Englishman left the minister's house in a very bewildered state of mind.

"Upon my word, this is the strangest thing that ever happened to me!" he exclaimed as he proceeded through the cross street to Broadway.

"Nobody ever gives me credit for possessing any great amount of sense," he continued. "But, really, it seems to me that in this affair I have made a bigger donkey of myself than usual!"

Then he went on for a couple of blocks in silence; suddenly he broke out with:

"Upon my life! when you come to look into the matter, I will be hanged if I can see that I have done anything out of the way!"

"I am just as innocent of any wrong-doing as a baby, and the more I reflect upon the matter, the more I become mixed up."

"What on earth is it all about, anyway?"

And the young actor shook his head and looked about him in a helpless way as he strode along.

"Now, how did those deuced railway shares get into my trunk?" he said, abruptly.

"By Jove! doesn't it look as if some one put them there on purpose to get me into trouble, and who would want to play me an ugly trick of that kind?"

"Upon my word, it is the greatest possible mystery," he continued.

"I did not really believe that I had an enemy in the world, but this affair looks as if some one had a perfectly awful grudge against me, and had gone to considerable trouble to put me in a perfectly dreadful hole!"

"And the fifteen thousand dollars' worth of bonds, too!" Somerset added.

"Now what in the name of all that is wonderful, made those detectives get the idea into their heads that I knew anything about the bonds?"

"And from what the detectives said, it is

evident they believe Miss Mignon to be implicated in the stealing of the bonds.

"The idea of such a thing! How utterly ridiculous!" he exclaimed.

"And how was the matter settled, anyway?"

"By Jove! the more I think about the affair, the more perplexed I become.

"That chief detective was as bold as a lion when he left me for the purpose of seeing Miss Mignon, but when he came back he was as mild as a sheep!"

"Very—very odd!"

Then in silence the bewildered Englishman went on a couple of blocks, meditating deeply upon the strange events of the night.

"As near as I can make out," he said at last, "all this trouble came because I visited Miss Mignon and got a loan from her.

"I don't know why it should lead to all this bother, but it certainly seems as if it did.

"I was donkey enough, too, to tell the Howards about how lucky I was to get the loan from Miss Mignon, and they, of course, thinking no harm, told other people, and, in some way, it came to the ears of the detectives, which led to collaring me.

"Now then, Somerset, my boy, this little affair ought to teach you wisdom.

"Still, though, when you come to think of it, I will be blessed if I see that I did anything out of the way!"

By this time the young Englishman had reached his boarding-house.

Entering, he ascended to his room, and in the hall encountered Crickton and Clever Charley.

The pair had been on the watch for the purpose of seeing how their plot worked.

When Somerset was arrested they followed the officers, and their prisoner, at a safe distance in the rear, and were considerably amazed when they found that instead of being consigned to a prison, Somerset was taken to a hotel.

Then the crackman followed the police captain when he called on Miss Lecount, leaving Clever Charley to see what became of Somerset.

Back again to the hotel Crickton had come in the track of Captain Constantine, and then the pair had followed in the footsteps of the young Englishman when he had gone to the Lecount mansion.

From the circumstances they conjectured that Somerset had been released, and were much puzzled to account for it.

One thing was certain, their plot had not worked as they had expected.

The pair concealed themselves in the neighborhood of the house until Somerset made his appearance; then, when he started toward Broadway they conjectured that he was home-bound and by making a detour they managed to get to the boarding-house before him.

"Hello, old chap! where have you been?" Crickton inquired.

"Yes, and I say: who were those two fellows who were going down the street with you?" Clever Charley asked.

"I am not very well posted about this blooming country, you know, but I will be hanged if the thought didn't strike me that they were a pair of bailiffs, for both of them had a regular hang-dog look," he continued. "I was just coming up the street as you went down," the crook explained.

"By Jove! old fellow, you were about right!" Somerset exclaimed.

"But come in to my room, and I will tell you all about it."

The young actor could not resist the temptation to relate the particulars of his strange adventure.

The pair listened with the utmost attention, and when Somerset came to an end, Crickton said:

"Well, old chap, I will give you my word that this is about the strangest affair that I ever heard of—a regular mystery, don't you know?"

"Yes, that is so," Clever Charley assented.

"Really, when you come to think of it, you see, it is just like a page out of a novel," he continued.

"Well, I can assure you that I had a deuced unpleasant time of it, and I am not anxious for any more experience in that line," Somerset declared.

"Miss Mignon acted like a trump, though," the crackman remarked.

"Oh, yes; she wouldn't have it at all, you know," the young man explained.

"She declared it was a mistake, and she was satisfied that I was perfectly innocent."

"But what did she think about the railway shares being found in your trunk?" Crickton asked.

"She took a sensible view of it, of course," Somerset replied.

"When I declared that I knew nothing at all about the matter, she believed me. She knew me well enough to understand that it was not possible for me to be mixed up in any such disgraceful business.

"My trunk is just a common affair, you know, with a very ordinary kind of a lock—a lock which could be easily picked, you understand, and it would not be a difficult matter for any one who had a grudge against me to open the

trunk with a false key and put the securities in it."

"Have you any suspicion as to the party who would like to play a trick of that kind on you?" Crickton asked with an appearance of great concern.

"Not the slightest! My dear fellow, I did not know that I had a foe in the world!" Somerset replied.

The pair of rascals consoled with the young actor for a while and then they departed.

In the seclusion of their apartment they held a consultation.

"What will the next move be do you think?" Clever Charley asked.

"Well, I don't know," Crickton replied. "I have some ideas in my head which I will suggest to Murphy when I see him."

"Will you try to hunt him up to-night?"

"No, to-morrow will do. There isn't anything pressing, and we can probably run across him at the chop-house at almost any time."

To the crooks the future appeared serene.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CROOKS IN COUNCIL.

TRANSFER we the scene again to the English chop-house, with the shady reputation, in the up-down cross street.

Captain Murphy sat at a table in a quiet corner waiting for the coming of the two Englishmen.

"It was ten o'clock on the night following the one on which had occurred the events detailed in our last chapters.

The captain had only been in the room about ten minutes when the two crooks made their appearance.

Murphy finished his glass of ale and ordered a fresh supply. When the order was executed, and the waiter was out of hearing, the captain said:

"Here's luck, boys!"

Then they all took a swig at the ale.

Murphy cast a careless glance around.

"There isn't any one within hearing, and so I think we can speak freely if we are careful to speak in a low tone," he observed.

"We took a run in here yesterday afternoon and a couple of times to-day but the landlord said he hadn't seen anything of you," Crickton remarked.

"And, really, you know, we had about come to the conclusion that you had cut your lucky for good," Clever Charley added.

"Oh, no; there isn't any need of my taking French leave as far as I can see, for everything seems to be going on all right," the captain replied.

"We didn't know what to make of your not being around, for you did not say you were going away," Crickton observed.

"It was a sudden move on my part," Murphy explained. "And I had no idea of making it when I last saw you. But I knew there wasn't anything on hand that needed attention, and so I thought it would be a good idea for me to take a run over to a certain place and turn my bonds into cash, which I did.

"Of course bonds of that kind are not easily traced, but if by any unlucky accident I should happen to be nabbed by the officers, and the bonds were found on me, it would be certain to lead to a lot of unpleasant questioning, for it would not be possible for me to tell a good, straight-forward story in regard to how I happened to get them."

"That is true, and if the peelers once get their fingers on the bonds, it would be 'good-by, John' as far as you are concerned," Crickton declared.

"Ah, yes, if you were brought up before a 'beak' and he discovered that you had five thousand dollars' worth of bonds in your pocket it would be proof positive to him that you had been up to some mischief, and even if he couldn't prove it he would be certain to take the swag away from you," Clever Charley remarked.

"I know how that is, for I was caught in England once in just such a trap," he continued.

"I understand all about that, and so I was anxious to turn my bonds into cash as soon as I could."

"Did you do the trick?" Crickton asked.

"Oh, yes, sold them right in the open market, got the full price for them too, and managed the affair in such a way that no suspicion was excited," the captain explained.

"I went to ten different brokers and sold each man a single bond," he continued.

"Nothing out of the way in a well-dressed gentleman, like myself, having one five hundred dollar bond to dispose of, you know."

"Of course not!" Crickton declared.

"Mighty sharp trick!" Clever Charley added.

"I suppose you have got your stuff all safe?"

Murphy asked.

"Oh, yes, we have it planted all right. We didn't turn the bonds into cash, for we did not need the money; but we have the swag put away so safely that there isn't any danger of anybody being able to find it," Crickton replied.

"That is good! Well, how goes on everything?" the captain asked.

"I fancy that some part of our scheme has miscarried, for I haven't seen any account in the

newspapers of the arrest of Somerset," Murphy added.

"He was nabbed all right, and the railway shares found in his trunk," Crickton replied. But the police captain and the detective, who did the trick, came in plain clothes, and instead of carrying the man off to a jail, the detective took him to a hotel while the police captain went to see Miss Lecount."

"I see the game," Murphy remarked, thoughtfully. "The peeler thought there might be some money for him in the affair, and so he went in to make it."

"That is just it!" Crickton exclaimed.

"That is a move which I did not anticipate, and, consequently, did not provide against," Murphy observed, with a grave shake of the head.

"But I can see now just how the thing worked," he continued.

"When the officer told her of his capture, and showed her the railway shares, she guessed at once that there was some trick about the matter, for she is shrewd enough to understand that the young actor is not the man to take part in any such game."

"Yes, that is what she told the officer as he informed Somerset when he released him; she said she would not appear to prosecute, and so Somerset could not be held," Crickton related.

"She probably squared the police captain with a good sum of money, and so hushed the matter up," Murphy remarked.

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly; but of course Somerset knew nothing about that. He is a regular soft chap, you know, anyway, and all he knew about the affair was that Miss Lecount told the officer that he was innocent and must be released."

"Well, that settles that little scheme," Murphy remarked, thoughtfully.

"And now here comes another point that we must take into consideration," the captain continued.

"The girl does not believe that Somerset is in league with the men who robbed the safe—I think that is pretty certain?" he added with a questioning glance at the others.

Both agreed with him in regard to this point.

"But the fact that the shares were found concealed in his trunk, and that secret information was given to the police captain which led to the search of Somerset's room, indicates clearly that some one who was acquainted with Somerset, and was able to gain access to his room, knew something about the robbery."

"Now the girl is shrewd, and quick-witted, and she cannot fail to understand that an attempt has been made to make Somerset a scapegoat, so she will naturally suspect that somebody in the boarding-house is implicated in the robbery."

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt she will suspect something of the sort, but I fancy she will find it a hard task to get any clew," Crickton remarked, confidently.

"There are about twenty men in the house altogether, the majority of them actors, and from what I have seen of them, I fancy there are a few—not regular actors, but hangers-on to the stage—who would not mind taking a trick of this kind if it came in their way. So if the girl put the detectives on the track, the odds are big that they will spot one of these fellows."

"Oh, yes, they are hang-dog looking coves, men who follow the races and pick up a little money in the gambling way once in awhile," Clever Charley added.

"One thing is undoubtedly in your favor," the captain remarked. "You are strangers and no detective could spot you as being men with bad reputation."

"That is a fact!" Crickton exclaimed. "There may be an old pal or two, like yourself, in the country who knows what kind of men we are, but no one else can get a line on us."

"I say, Murphy, old chap, do you think there is any danger of the woman putting the detectives on this case?" Clever Charley asked.

"I think the chances are that she will," Murphy replied.

"To lose fifteen thousand dollars is no joke, and she will be apt to do something."

"You see, boys, I made a big mistake when I brought the actor into the thing by putting the railway shares in his trunk, for in thus attempting to strike a blow at the girl, I have given a clew which the detectives can work on if they are smart."

"You are correct about that," Crickton observed. "You see, the trouble was you wanted to do too much."

"It would have been better if you had not tried to work a game of that kind," Clever Charley declared.

"But then the best and wisest of men will make mistakes once in a while, and though, as you say, the detectives have a bit of a clew, I fancy they will not be able to make anything of it."

"I think Clever has got the thing down about right," the crackman remarked.

"Even if the detectives are satisfied that someone in the boarding-house knows something about the robbery, it will be almost impossible for them to spot us if we are careful how we behave."

"How came Somerset to tell you about the affair?" asked Murphy, abruptly.

"We have a room on the same floor, and as it happened, I came out into the entry just as the detective and the police captain walked into Somerset's room, and although they were both in plain clothes, yet I suspected they were officers the moment I saw them," Crickton explained.

"And so I listened at the door until I heard what was their little game and afterward we followed them.

"Then, when Somerset came back, Clever and I met him.

"It was easy to see that the man was troubled, and so we went in to pump him, and as he is one of those good-natured, leaky souls, who, because he is honest himself thinks everybody else is, we did not have any difficulty in getting a full account of his adventures out of him."

"Yes, I see. Well, we made a blunder of course, there is no mistake about that, but it is too late to correct it now, only we must use extra care what moves we make in the future," the captain remarked.

"If we are careful we will be all right," Crickton declared, in a confident tone.

"The detectives may have all the suspicions in the world, but if they can't get any real proof they can't do anything, therefore as long as we keep a stiff upper lip, and don't give the thing away ourselves, we cannot be convicted, even if we were nabbed on suspicion."

"Well, if I thought there was any danger of our being nabbed, and that evidence enough to warrant a prosecution could be found against us, I would suggest that we bolt immediately," Murphy remarked, in a reflective way.

"Ah, no! I don't think that is our game!" the cracksman declared.

"Decidedly not!" Clever Charley exclaimed. "What is the use of our cutting our lucky when we are not threatened by any danger?"

"We can keep our eyes open, you know, and if we see that the detectives are making any headway, then it will be time to bolt," he continued.

"That is true, and, although I am a man who believes in taking time by the forelock, yet in this case I don't see how the keenest of the bloodhounds will be able to get on the track," Murphy remarked, thoughtfully.

"Somerset is the only weak point," he continued.

"Don't you worry about him," the cracksman replied. "He is as soft as butter, and we can turn and twist him anyway we like. If the detectives attempt to use him he will be sure to tell us, and it will not be any trouble to keep posted, and then I have already started him on a false scent."

"How is that?" the captain asked.

CHAPTER XXVI. A NEW SCHEME.

"WHEN Somerset told me about his adventures with the officers, the thought immediately came to me that it might be the woman was smart enough to pretend to be willing to allow the affair to drop, in order to throw the men who did the job off their guard," Crickton remarked. "And at the same time had no idea of doing anything of the kind, but had firmly determined to do all in her power to catch the clever rogues who had got away with the bonds in such a mysterious manner."

"It is more than likely that you have hit upon the truth!" Murphy declared.

"That is just about what I said to Blackie when he explained the thing to me," Clever Charley declared.

"And I reasoned that the first thing the detectives would do when they started in on the case would be to find out from Somerset who he was intimate with in the house."

"Yes, that would be the starting-point," the captain assented.

"Well, as luck would have it, two of the men in the house, whose reputations are a little shady, have a room right next to Somerset's apartment, and there is a door which connects the two, but it is always kept locked and there is no key."

"It would be an easy matter for a man to get one, though, if he was so minded," Murphy observed.

"Exactly! not the slightest trouble about that," the cracksman declared, with a cunning smile.

"This precious pair are great card-players, and in fact, from what I have seen of them, I think they are a couple of professional gamblers, although they pretend to be connected with the stage," Crickton continued.

"And I suppose they took you three Englishmen for pigeons who could be easily plucked?" Murphy remarked.

"Yes, that is the game they tried to play, and Clever and myself have had considerable amusement in pretending to be a pair of innocents who would dearly like to throw away their money at cards if they had the money to spare."

"How about Somerset?" the captain inquired.

"Oh, there isn't anything of the gamester about him, and he has been deaf to their solicitations, but their endeavors to get him to gamble

have given him a bad opinion of them, and so, when I let fall a suggestion that I did not think the two men were any better than they ought to be, he caught at the idea immediately."

"Very cleverly done, Blackie!" the captain declared. "And this bit of business shows plainly that you have not lost any of your old-time cunning."

"When the detectives question Somerset he will tell them of his suspicion in regard to his next-door neighbors, and thus throw the bloodhounds off the track," Murphy said in conclusion.

"That was my idea," the cracksman replied.

"Before I left the city, too, I took certain precautions," the captain remarked.

"As you know, I have a spy in the minister's house, and I warned the party to keep a good watch for the purpose of seeing if the girl held any communication with the detectives."

"If the men came to the house the party, of course, would know it; but the girl might seek the bloodhounds in their offices, so my spy was instructed to follow her whenever she went out."

"Have you had any report from this spy since you came back?" the cracksman asked, much interested in the matter.

"Oh, yes; and so far everything is all right," the captain replied.

"The girl has only been out of the house once; then she only went to the corner and posted a letter in the mail-box."

"Looks as if it was an important one, or else she wouldn't have taken that trouble—she would have sent it by one of the servants," Clever Charley suggested.

"Yes, that seems likely," Murphy replied.

"Of course it was not possible for my spy to ascertain the direction on the letter, but I jumped to the conclusion that it was a letter to some detective inviting him to take charge of this case."

"Very likely!" Crickton exclaimed.

"But, so far, no one in the detective line has responded," the captain continued.

"The only stranger has been an old countryman—a retired minister, a Mr. Black, a college chum of Lecount's, who came to pay a long-promised visit, ignorant that death had taken his friend away. He is now domiciled in the house."

"It does not look then as if she had taken any steps to put the bloodhounds on the track," the cracksman observed, thoughtfully.

"No, but still waters run deep, and it is possible that the girl is engaged in some underhand work."

"Well, I don't know about that," Crickton responded.

"Ain't you making the mistake of rating her too highly?" the cracksman asked.

"It does not seem to me that it can be possible for the girl to suspect there is a spy in the house, keeping watch on her," he continued. "And if she intended to employ detectives she would be apt to do so openly."

"That seems to be good, sound reasoning," the captain remarked. "It may be that she is waiting for the return of Captain Constantine's report. He has apparently taken charge of the case, and she may believe that he will be able to catch the man who did the job."

"The captain certainly acted promptly as far as Somerset was concerned," the cracksman remarked with a laugh.

"Oh, yes, he put the collar on Somerset with wonderful promptness," Clever Charley observed.

"And as he did not succeed in doing anything, the captain will be apt, I think, to become disgusted with the matter, and I doubt if he will trouble his head much about the affair," Murphy suggested.

"Yes, this woman evidently refused to prosecute, and probably demanded the release of Somerset, although one would think from the fact of the securities being found in his trunk that she would have had a suspicion that it might be possible that he really had something to do with the matter," Crickton remarked.

"Well, I don't know about that," the captain replied.

"From what my old pal told me about her character I judge she is a willful, headstrong woman who is fond of having her own way," he continued.

"And she evidently has a good opinion of Somerset," he added.

"Oh, yes, she showed that by lending him the money," Crickton remarked.

"That is pretty strong proof that she thought a good deal of him in my opinion!" Clever Charley declared.

"I do not know much about women, for they have never brought me any luck, and I have made it a rule not to allow myself to get mixed up with any of the fair sex, but from what I have seen of them, I should judge that they hold on to their money pretty tightly, and when one of them is willing to lend a fellow money, without much prospect of getting it back, it shows that she has a mighty good opinion of him," Clever Charley said in conclusion.

"Well, my spy will keep me posted about the matter," Murphy asserted. "But if—as is probable—this girl is trusting to the police captain

to get to the heart of the mystery, there is not the slightest danger of us being discovered."

"Oh, no!" the cracksman exclaimed. "I haven't any opinion at all of that peeler. I judge, from what little I heard of his talk, that he is a regular blow-hard. One of the kind, you understand, that goes in for bullying his man and frightening him into a confession."

"A game of that kind would not work with old stagers like us though," Murphy declared.

"Oh, no!" Clever Charley asserted. "We have been through the mill too often to be scared by words."

"Well, as far as that trick goes, I think we are perfectly safe, and can laugh at all attempts to bring the job home to us," the captain remarked.

The pair of cracksmen agreed to this.

"And now, boys, I have got another little scheme on hand which I think will pay us pretty well, if we can work it, and it is right in the same house too where we did the other job."

"We are familiar with the ground then at all events," Crickton remarked with a smile.

"This minister's daughter used to be an actress, and she had a pretty hard time to get along, for she didn't know anything about her father until about a year ago; since that time, of course, she has lived in clover, but I will do her the justice to say that she has behaved herself remarkably well, and hasn't gone in for making much of a display."

"That was odd too, for these actresses are apt to be high-flyers," Crickton commented.

"I suppose she was on her good behavior," Murphy replied.

"Probably wanted to keep on the right side of the old man," Clever Charley suggested.

"Yes, that was the idea, I suppose," the captain asserted.

"Well, if it was, it worked all right, for she has come in for all the old man's cash, about a hundred thousand dollars, they say."

"Ah! that is a tidy bit of swag!" Crickton exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, and she could well afford to mind her p's and q's with a prospect like that before her," Clever Charley remarked.

"She is going in to make up for lost time now," Murphy resumed. "For she says that as soon as her mourning period is over, she will show some of these New York dames a thing or two about cutting a dash, and, as a preliminary, she is going to buy twenty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds."

"What? twenty thousand dollars' worth?" the cracksman exclaimed, in amazement.

"Well, well, she is going to cut out the pace with a vengeance!" Clever Charley declared.

"Ah, but isn't it all talk, you know?" Crickton asked, incredulously. "It can't be possible that she is going in for diamonds to the tune of twenty thousand dollars?"

"Oh, it is true enough!" Murphy replied.

"She means to do it, for she sent down to-day to one of the leading Broadway jewelers, and had a lot of stones brought up for her inspection."

"That looks as if she meant it!" Clever Charley declared.

"Oh, she does; there isn't a doubt about the matter," Murphy replied. "For she took five thousand dollars' worth of diamonds to-day, and has them locked up in her safe."

"The identical piece of furniture that we worked so easily?" Crickton asked.

"The same."

"It would not be much trouble for us to try the trick over again," Clever Charley suggested, with a grin.

"That is exactly the game that I have in mind," Murphy replied.

"I twigs!" the cracksman declared. "You will wait until she gets the whole twenty thousand dollars' worth of sparklers, then you will give us the office, and we will go in and collar all of the precious swag!"

"You have hit it! That is the game!" the captain declared.

"My eyes! what a prospect!" Clever Charley exclaimed. "Why, old pals, you make my mouth water!"

And then the three fell to discoursing how they could dispose of the diamonds after they got them, and so we leave them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAWYER'S PLAN.

AGAIN we will visit the young lawyers, Kaynoll and Wirewax, in their office.

Wirewax was busy at his desk with some legal papers when Kaynoll had just come in and taken a chair by his side, a look on his face which seemed to imply that he was well satisfied with the way things were going.

"To judge from the smile upon your lips the prospect is a rosy one," Wirewax remarked.

"Yes, my dear fellow, as far as I can see it is all plain sailing and clear water ahead," Kaynoll replied.

"That is good, and it was a fortunate thing for us that this affair happened as it did—the minister's death, I mean—and your being called upon to settle the estate."

"Oh, yes, for it gives me the command of con-

siderable money which I can use to tide us over this crisis in our affairs," Kaynoll replied.

"The estate will foot up about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, I think, fifty thousand more than I supposed," he continued.

"The old gentleman invested in Western lands, years ago when they could be bought for a song and they have increased fifty-fold in value, as nearly as I can find out."

"Well, that certainly was a fortunate investment for him."

"Yes; he apparently had a great idea of these western lands, for nearly all his money is invested in them. There is only about twenty or thirty thousand dollars in stocks and bonds and mortgages."

"He seems then to have been quite a long-headed old gentleman, and that is more than anybody gave him credit for being."

"I believe he preached in the western country in the early part of his ministerial career, and so, I suppose, acquired a good knowledge of the country, and when he had a few thousand dollars to spare knew exactly where he could invest it."

"Now, see how you can be deceived about a man!" Wirewax exclaimed.

"If any one had questioned me in regard to his business capabilities, I would have declared that he did not have any, and yet he knew enough to invest his money so that one dollar grew into fifty."

"He was one of the men whom it was hard to gauge," Kaynoll observed. "For he was quiet and reserved, not at all given to speaking of his private affairs, even to his intimate friends."

"I knew he had considerable money invested in the West, from chance observations which he let fall from time to time, but as he never went into any particulars in regard to the matter I, somehow, got the notion that a gang of these smart western land sharpers had succeeded in sticking him with a lot of worthless property."

"My notion was that he had been induced to invest in property in some booming town when the boom was at its height, and the collapsing of the bubble had busted things generally."

"Well, I had that impression, too, from what you said about the matter. I thought he had been stuck—and stuck pretty badly, too."

"Quite the contrary, although I find that the general impression among the people who were at all acquainted with the old gentleman's business is that his western land is worthless, and this mistake has suggested an idea to me."

"What is it—good, I hope?"

"Listen, and you shall judge," Kaynoll remarked.

"You remember that I had a notion that it might pay me to make up to Miss Lecount?"

Wirewax nodded.

"As I explained, that boasting donkey of a police captain got the idea into his thick head that the young lady had something to do with the robbery of the safe; now I propose to tell Miss Lecount in regard to the absurd idea, and then enlist her gratitude by announcing that I am going to act as her champion, and would make the officer pay dearly if he dared to attempt to persecute her in any way."

"Yes, the idea is an excellent one!"

"And, another one has come to me which is just as good."

"After I tell her about this stupid idiot of a police captain, I will explain to her that I have been looking into these Western land speculations of her father, and express the fear that but little of the money which he was induced to invest in them will ever be recovered."

"Ah, yes, I comprehend!" Wirewax declared.

"Really, my dear fellow, I must say that this is a genuine stroke of genius."

"I will say I am sorely afraid that, owing to the loss of the large sum in United States bonds, it is likely her father's estate will not realize more than twenty or thirty thousand dollars, but if the Western lands are properly handled, perhaps a few more thousand can be got—in time."

"Then I will assume a tender tone—tell her that when I thought she was a great heiress I was afraid to reveal my love, and ask for the priceless treasure of her hand for fear my motives might be misconstrued—that I might be looked upon as a fortune-hunter, but now the truth was known to me—now that I was aware she had but a few thousand dollars, and her estate was in such a condition that it needed the care of an earnest, experienced man of business, I was encouraged to speak and tell my love."

"Capital, capital!" Wirewax exclaimed, rubbing his hands together in glee.

"Really, my dear Kaynoll, you made a great mistake when you decided to confine yourself to office practice," the partner continued.

"You should have gone into the open courts for you would undoubtedly have made your mark as a special pleader, judging from this exhibition of eloquence which you have just given."

"Really your compliments overwhelm me," Kaynoll replied with a polite bow.

"But, joking aside, I think I would have been able to hold my own with the majority of them if I had gone in on that line, but if I can succeed in making a success of this little game I shall be satisfied."

"Well, it certainly seems to me as if you stood an excellent chance," Wirewax remarked in a reflective way.

"I am not particularly well acquainted with the lady, although I have often met her, but she was one of those quiet kind of girls who seem to be perfectly content to remain in the background, and apparently did not care to attract attention."

"Yes, she never did much talking, and appeared to be of a retiring disposition. In fact, I always had the idea she was a little dull, but, really, I do not know enough of her to form a good opinion, although eight or ten months ago, when I first made her acquaintance, the idea came to me that it might not be a bad notion for me to make a match with her, but when I tried to get on a familiar footing she seemed so cold and distant that I concluded I would rather not marry such a human iceberg."

"But if the iceberg has got a hundred and fifty thousand dollars you might be able to endure the coldness," Wirewax suggested.

"Oh, yes, for the satisfaction of being able to handle a sum of money like that a man could put up with a girl of that kind, for she is good-looking and ladylike, even if she isn't very bright."

"I have heard it said that she didn't appear to care for admirers."

"That is true. I have known of a half a dozen nice young fellows, without much money though, who thought it would be a good thing to secure a wife like the minister's daughter, but not one of them met with any encouragement."

"And there was one fellow, by the way, who was pretty well off, who took a fancy to her, but he couldn't make any impression, but now that her father is dead, she may think it desirable to get married and secure a protector; but I must be off, for I am going to call on her and try my luck right away."

"Good luck go with you!" Wirewax exclaimed, and Kaynoll laughed confidently as he departed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MIGNON'S DIAMONDS.

THE young lawyer proceeded directly to the minister's house.

As the reader has possibly discovered, the gentleman had an extremely good opinion of himself, and the fact that a number of gentlemen had unsuccessfully paid court to Miss Lecount did not discourage him in the least.

Because they had failed did not suggest to him that he stood no chance, for in his egotism he considered that he was far superior to any of the men who had sought to engage the affections of the heiress.

Upon arriving at the house, and sending in his message desiring an interview with Mignon, he was conducted to the study, which was now the girl's favorite resort.

He found in the apartment a gray-bearded gentleman whom he recognized as one of the head salesmen of the most prominent jewelry firms in New York, and the gentleman was engaged in displaying some really magnificent diamonds to the girl.

"You have arrived just in time, Mr. Kaynoll, to favor me with your opinion," Mignon declared.

"I am in doubt which of these two pair of earrings to take," she continued.

"See! this pair is three thousand dollars and the other four thousand," and she directed his attention to the jewels which were placed side by side.

"Of course one pair is a thousand more than the other, but I really think they are worth it."

This declaration astounded the lawyer.

"Really, Miss Lecount, I am not much of a judge of this sort of thing," he replied. "This gentleman's opinion"—and he nodded to the salesman—"is far more valuable than mine."

"Oh, it is a mere matter of taste," the girl replied. "There isn't any question that the more costly pair are well worth the difference, and I think I will take them."

Kaynoll's amazement increased.

Was this quiet girl, whom he thought so commonplace and dull, foolish enough to give four thousand dollars for a pair of jewels to wear in her ears?

It really seemed incredible and he could not forbear speaking about the matter.

"It is rather an expensive pair of earrings, isn't it Miss Lecount?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose so," she replied, in an indifferent way, holding the diamonds up so the rays of light could strike them, and admiring the jewels as she spoke.

"But the fact is I have a perfect passion for diamonds," she continued.

"While my father lived I did not consider it proper to gratify my wishes in this direction, even if he had been perfectly willing, for I do not think that it shows good taste for a minister's daughter to indulge in trinkets; but now that my circumstances are changed, I do not think that it is any harm for me to satisfy my longings for diamonds."

"No, I suppose not," Kaynoll observed, slowly, so amazed by this unexpected development that he did not know exactly what to say.

"When will the necklace be ready for my inspection?" the girl asked.

"In a day or two I hope to be able to submit it. The alterations which you suggested are being made," the gentleman replied.

"And those alterations will bring the price up to about ten thousand," the girl said.

"Yes, about ten thousand—it really comes to a few dollars more, but Mr. Tiffany said that, in consideration of the largeness of your purchases, the firm could afford to throw off the extra."

The lawyer's amazement increased.

"A diamond necklace to cost ten thousand dollars, in addition to the ear-rings!"

Fourteen thousand dollars in diamonds!

What on earth had got into the girl!

"By the way, the necklace will cost just twice what the bracelets come to," Mignon remarked, with a calculating air.

"Yes; and really, Miss Lecount, you are getting a decided bargain," the salesman declared.

Bracelets! and the lawyer's amazement was so great that he could not help showing it in his face.

Mignon noticed the look, of course, but she did not appear as though she saw it.

"And, by the way, Mr. Kaynoll, I didn't show you my new bracelets, did I?"

"No—no, I think not," the lawyer replied, hardly knowing what to say, so astonished was he at this unexpected notion of the heiress.

"They are really beautiful!" Mignon declared.

And then she got the diamonds from the safe and presented them for Kaynoll's inspection.

"They cost five thousand. You don't think they are dear, do you?" the girl asked.

"Well, really, I am not a judge, you know, but I do not doubt that they are well worth the money," the lawyer replied.

And in his mind he wondered if the girl's sudden rise to fortune had not disturbed her mental balance a little, for it did not seem possible to him that if she was in the full possession of her senses, she would be foolish enough to invest nearly twenty thousand dollars in diamonds.

"They are real beauties!" Mignon declared, in a burst of enthusiasm. "And I absolutely love them!"

Then she placed the jewels in the safe, while the salesman rose to depart.

"Bring the necklace up as soon as it is ready," the girl remarked. "And just as soon as Mr. Kaynoll gets my affairs straightened out so as to give me some money, I will send you a check."

"No hurry at all, I assure you," responded the gentleman with a polite bow, and then he took his departure.

"It is a blessed thing to have plenty of money, isn't it, Mr. Kaynoll?" Mignon remarked, in an innocent way, and with a charming smile.

"Oh, yes; but really, Miss Lecount—I trust you will excuse me for speaking—but isn't nineteen thousand dollars a pretty large sum to invest in jewelry?"

"It will be about twenty-four thousand before I get through," she replied.

"Twenty-four thousand!" the lawyer exclaimed, his astonishment renewed by this announcement.

"Yes; there is a brooch to come, which will be four or five thousand more," she explained.

"I was not satisfied with what they had in stock and so I had one made to order. And by the way, Mr. Kaynoll, you must hurry up and get me some money, so I can send the jeweler a check; though, really, I presume there is no need of haste, for one of the firm is a member of my father's church, and was his personal friend, so, of course, he knows I am amply able to pay."

"Oh, yes; that is all right, certainly. But, really, Miss Lecount, I had no idea that your taste ran in this direction."

"As long as my father lived, I should not have gratified my passion for diamonds, but now that I am my own mistress, I think it no harm to do so."

"By the way, to change the subject, have you heard anything from the police captain about the robbery?" Mignon asked.

The lawyer had volunteered to attend to the matter.

"No, nothing, and, to tell you the truth, Miss Lecount, I do not believe the captain will take the trouble to pursue the matter further."

"Why is that?" Mignon asked, with an expression on her face as though she was amazed by the intelligence.

"The captain is a peculiar man, you see, very obstinate and pig-headed, and when he once gets a notion is apt to stick to it very strongly," Kaynoll explained.

"What you say does not surprise me for I will have to admit that from what little I have seen of the man I am not favorably impressed by him," Mignon observed.

"He is a regular donkey in some respects, and you might just as well talk to a post as attempt to argue with him, for when he becomes wedded to an idea he is deaf to reason."

"I should suppose so from what I saw of the man."

"Now, for instance, he has got the most

ridiculous idea in his head about this robbery," Kaynoll remarked, slowly, and affecting to be rather embarrassed.

"When he was making his examination here he appeared to be completely in the dark in regard to the matter," Mignon observed.

"He is in the dark now as much as he ever was as far as getting a clue to how the robbery was performed is concerned," the lawyer replied. "And from the idea which he has now got in his head I think he is likely to keep so."

"What is the idea?"

"You must not be offended, you know," Kaynoll warned, "for it is only the stupid idea of an ignorant and obstinate man."

"Certainly not! It is a matter of perfect indifference to me what the man thinks!" the girl exclaimed with a look of scorn upon her expressive features.

"Well, I don't know as you will hardly be able to credit it, but the man appears to believe that you had something to do with the robbery."

"Is it possible?" Mignon exclaimed, affecting to be astonished.

"Yes, and I had to talk to him pretty plainly about the matter, for you may rest assured I would not tamely listen to such an accusation."

"Whatever may happen, Miss Lecount, you can depend upon finding a firm and faithful friend in me!" the lawyer declared in quite a theatrical way.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAWYER'S WOOING.

WITH a graceful bend of the head, and a pleasant smile, Mignon acknowledged the speech.

"I gave the captain to understand very plainly that he must not make the mistake of thinking that because you had lost your father you were without a male protector," Kaynoll declared.

"And, under the circumstances, I hardly think the captain will dare to attempt to annoy you in any way, obstinate and pig-headed as he is."

"I am really grateful to you for your kindness," Mignon remarked. "But the matter is not worth talking about. The idea is absurd, and I fancy the man will find it difficult to bring forward anything to support the theory."

"By the way, I have been making an examination into your father's affairs, and I regret that I am obliged to say that I am afraid your father made some extremely unwise investments."

"I am astonished to hear that," the girl replied. "Of course, I do not know a great deal about my father's business matters, for he was not a man who cared to talk about such things, but from what little I do know I had the impression that all his investments were very safe ones, for he went on the idea that it was better to take less interest than to endanger the safety of the principal."

"A very excellent rule, and if he had only stuck to it everything would have been all right, but, as it is I fear that the bulk of his money, which he invested in Western lands, will not be easily recovered."

"Is it possible?" Mignon asked, but to the surprise of Kaynoll she did not seem to be particularly troubled about the matter.

"Yes, and that is the reason why I am surprised at your investing so heavily in diamonds, for unless the Western land investments turn out to be far better than I expect, it does not look now as if the estate will amount to more than twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars."

"If that is the truth I could ill-afford to lose the fifteen thousand dollars' worth of bonds," the girl remarked, with an air of unconcern which surprised the gentleman.

"I am very sorry indeed that I cannot make a better report," Kaynoll remarked, shaking his head, and affecting to be deeply interested in the matter.

"But it is possible, you know, that the bonds may be recovered," the lawyer suggested.

"If the detectives are sufficiently shrewd to get on the tracks of the thieves, and succeed in arresting the rascals, perhaps the bonds would be captured also," he explained.

Mignon shook her head.

"You doubt the possibility of any such good fortune coming to you?" Kaynoll remarked.

"I do, indeed! As far as I can see the detectives are utterly in the dark," she replied.

"They have not succeeded in gaining the slightest clue to the robbers, and I must confess that it is my opinion that they will not be able to accomplish the feat, for the rogues are too smart for them."

"It certainly does seem to be so at present," Kaynoll replied.

"The affair is a very unfortunate one it must be admitted."

"And I can assure you, Miss Lecount, that you have my deepest sympathy," he continued.

"But you can depend upon it that I will do all in my power to aid you in every way."

"I am duly grateful for the interest which you manifest in my affairs," the girl observed.

"I had the honor to be your father's legal adviser, and I think I may remark that he looked upon me in the light of a friend; therefore it is the most natural thing in the world for me to take more than a mere professional business in-

terest in your affairs, and then besides that, Miss Mignon—if you will permit me to thus familiarly address you—during the last few months I have discovered that a stronger and deeper feeling than friendship has sprung up in my heart for you, and now that your father's sudden death has left you without a protector I feel emboldened to tell you the thoughts which are in my mind."

"If you had been the wealthy heiress which every one supposed when the news of your father's death became public, I might have hesitated to speak for fear that my motives would be misunderstood; I have no desire, you understand, to figure in the role of a fortune-hunter, nor to even have any one attribute sordid desires to me, but as the case now stands, with your estate sadly impaired, needing the care of an experienced, able lawyer, I feel that I ought not to hesitate to speak—to ask you to accept the lifelong devotion of a man who truly loves you!"

The lawyer came to a stop, so that his swelling sentence might produce due impression and Mignon seized upon the opportunity to speak.

"Mr. Kaynoll, I am sorry to be obliged to give you an unfavorable answer," she remarked in a cool, matter-of-fact way, evidently not at all affected by the young man's eloquence.

"I shall have to decline your suit," she continued, and then Mignon added:

"I feel honored by the request, and am sorry that I cannot give you an answer in the affirmative."

The lawyer was completely surprised by the cool, deliberate way in which the girl spoke, and for a moment he was confused.

He had not been sure that he would be accepted, but he never for an instant imagined that an immediate rejection was in store for him.

In a moment he recovered from the surprise and in his smoothest tones remarked:

"Really now, Miss Mignon, you reduce me to a state of complete despair. But may I not be allowed to hope there is a chance that in time you may be induced to reconsider your answer?—unless indeed there is some other gentleman to whom you have plighted your troth."

"Oh, no, I am heart-free," the girl replied immediately. "And I am strongly of the opinion too, that I always shall remain so."

"I do not believe there is a man in the world possessed of sufficient eloquence to make me believe that I would be happier in the married state than I now am in the single."

Kaynoll was surprised by the decided way in which the girl spoke.

Here was an exhibition of spirit which astonished him. He was wise enough though to understand that she knew her own mind, and it would be useless for him to attempt to persuade her to change her opinion.

"Ah, well, I am truly sorry," he remarked with a grave shake of the head. "But I can console myself with the thought that if I am denied the boon of a matrimonial alliance with you, I can still prove myself to be your devoted friend."

"I shall always feel honored by your friendship, I am sure," Mignon replied, politely.

"But to return to business matters," she continued after a moment's pause.

"Are you not in error in regard to the value of these Western lands?"

The lawyer was surprised by the speech, for it had not entered into his imagination that the girl would be apt to know anything about the matter.

He was shrewd enough though to conceal his feelings by assuming a wise look.

Of course, it is a rather difficult matter to ascertain the exact truth, without a personal visit to the section where the land is located," he remarked.

"As it happens, I have a personal knowledge of the country," Mignon observed. "I spent some few weeks in Nebraska four years ago, and so was tolerably well informed in regard to land values in that locality."

"Really, I am surprised," Kaynoll remarked, very much put out by this unwelcome intelligence.

"I did not suppose that ladies took an interest in that sort of thing."

"I presume, as a rule, that is correct, but I happened to become acquainted with the subject on account of stopping at a hotel in Lincoln—the capital of the State—kept by a gentleman who had made a great deal of money by speculating in Western land."

"His wife and I became great friends, and so I learned all the particulars of the gentleman's real estate speculations, and he explained the transactions to me the more fully because his wife was anxious I should make an investment."

"Ah, yes, I see," Kaynoll assented, pretending to take a great interest in the recital, but in truth terribly annoyed at the unfortunate chance which had given the girl an opportunity to become acquainted with the particulars.

"So when my father chanced to speak one day of his Western land investment, I was in a position to appreciate how fortunate he had been."

"Yes, yes, of course," the lawyer remarked, with a pleasant smile, but in reality he was sorely disgusted.

"The papers probably show that my father

bought the land for nine and ten dollars an acre," Mignon continued.

"It is all in the immediate neighborhood of Lincoln, and at the time the purchase was made the town only had a population of a few hundred, possibly two thousand, while now, I believe, the claim is that it exceeds thirty thousand."

"When I was there four years ago it was really a little metropolis, bustling and go-ahead! A prominent railroad center, too, and the inhabitants were confidently predicting that in another ten years it would be the largest city in the State."

"I am amazed!" Kaynoll declared, so annoyed by this revelation that he did not exactly know what to say.

"Then my father explained to me that as he had faith the property was destined to rise in value he had refused all offers to sell, but had divided the lands into small farms, erected houses and barns, set out fruit trees and shelter-belts, with proper fencing, and then rented the places, and from what I know in regard to the price of farms in that neighborhood, I judge there is not one of the properties which will not fetch fifty dollars an acre, while those in near proximity to Lincoln will command a hundred."

"Well, I sincerely hope for your sake, Miss Lecount, that this is the truth," the lawyer remarked, doing his best to conceal his disappointment.

"Of course, I only made a casual examination, and as I knew nothing about the country, I came to the conclusion that the lands would not sell for one-half of what they cost."

"You see, I have known so many New Yorkers to invest in these western lands with the expectation of selling out at a good price, and then, after holding on for years, and paying out a small fortune in taxes, been compelled to get rid of them at an enormous sacrifice," he explained.

"Oh, yes; I do not doubt there has been hundreds of such cases," the girl observed.

"But, you see, my father knew all about the country," she continued.

"He had a church in Lincoln, and resided there for over three years, so when he made his investments he knew exactly what he was about."

"I really am delighted to hear it, I assure you!" the lawyer declared, doing his best to appear sincere.

"And then, since you were here, I discovered some facts in regard to my father's estate which I believe are not known to you."

"Is it possible?" asked Kaynoll, with the mental reflection that he was doomed to encounter all sorts of surprises.

"Yes; in looking over my father's desk I discovered, carelessly placed in a pigeon-hole with a lot of unimportant papers, his life-insurance policy and the deed of this house."

"Ah, yes; come to think of it, I believe he did own the house!" the lawyer exclaimed. "And I do not understand how it was that the fact escaped my remembrance; but the life insurance I knew nothing about."

"He was insured for thirty thousand dollars."

"Well, well, that is a windfall!" Kaynoll exclaimed.

"And the house cost him exactly the same amount when he purchased it some ten years ago, and, I presume, it has not lessened in value in that time."

"Oh, no, the probabilities are that it is worth more money now."

The footman interrupted the conversation at this point with a card.

"Ah, here is a gentleman from the life-insurance company now," Mignon remarked, after glancing at the card.

"Show him up!" she ordered.

In a few moments the insurance-agent made his appearance, a short, stout, fussy old gentleman, with a pompous, imposing way.

He was all smiles and politeness when he introduced himself, then when he spoke of the "late lamented" minister his voice and manner changed, and one would almost imagine that tears stood in his eyes.

In fact, the gentleman was able so quickly to change his moods that it was plain the stage had lost a man who would have been a bright and shining histrionic star when he went into the insurance trade.

Then, after condoling with the lady on her loss and explaining how much he, personally, had always thought of her father, he came to business.

His company would waive the usual days of grace and were prepared to send her a check for the amount of her claim if it would be any accommodation.

Mignon thanked the gentleman for his kind consideration, and replied that the check would be acceptable, as it would save her from getting an advance from the executors of the estate.

The lawyer was amazed by the self-possession and knowledge of the girl.

An old woman of business, after years of experience, could not have handled the matter better.

Then the insurance gentleman came to what was really the object of his visit.

His company having lost the father, would be pleased to insure the daughter, and the gentleman did his best to show the girl what a desirable thing it would be for her.

Mignon laughed and said she would give the matter due consideration, but astonished both of the gentlemen by announcing that she did not believe she was a good risk, and thought the managing man of the company would agree with her after she had made certain explanations.

"Surely you are in good health!" the insurance agent declared.

"If you are not, then I must say that my judgment is at fault, and you are an extremely deceptive-looking young lady," he declared in conclusion.

"On, I think I could pass the doctor's examination all right," she replied. "I do not imagine there is any doubt about that, but though I am in perfect health, as far as I know, yet I do not believe I would be a good risk," and then she laughed at the surprise so plainly expressed upon the faces of the pair.

"But I can only explain the matter to the manager of the company, so I will not be able to gratify your curiosity."

"Ah, Miss Lecount, I am sadly afraid that you are amusing yourself by making game of us!" the insurance-agent declared.

"But I trust you will not neglect the matter, for I am sure it will be to your interest to allow us to write a policy for you," he continued as he rose to depart.

"You can depend upon my paying a visit to the office of your company, and if, after hearing my explanation, your manager considers that I am a good risk I shall be pleased to insure with you," the girl replied.

"Oh, we will take you all right! There isn't a doubt about that in my mind!" the gentleman declared, as he departed.

"This check will come in quite handy," Mignon remarked, to the lawyer. "And it will save me from calling upon you for money for a while."

"Yes, yes, very true."

"You see I will be able to pay for my diamonds, and provide for my expenses until you settle the estate."

"It will not take very long long, for everything is in good shape," Kaynoll remarked, and then he took his leave, feeling decidedly discouraged.

"Upon my word!" he muttered, as he descended the stairs, "this girl is a regular riddle, and I do not think I ever made such a mistake in judgment, as I did about her character, in all my life!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DETECTIVE'S SUSPICIONS.

AFTER Kaynoll's departure Mignon went to the door and listened until she heard the servant let him out at the main portal.

Then she closed the door, turned the key in the lock, being careful not to make any noise, and as she faced about she caught sight of Joe Phenix, who had entered by the door which led into the small room connecting the front and rear apartments.

The detective had been given the rear room, and had fixed the door, through which he had just come, in such a way that while it appeared to be shut it was slightly ajar, so that by taking a station by it, he could easily overhear all that passed in the front room.

"Put your handkerchief over the door-knob so as to keep any one from looking through the keyhole," Joe Phenix requested.

Mignon complied, then she resumed her seat by the table, by which the detective had taken a chair.

"You have discovered that some one is playing the spy?" the girl asked.

"Yes; it is the housekeeper, Mrs. Monford."

"You remember that I told you I suspected she would bear watching?" the girl remarked.

"I had nothing tangible to go on either, for she has been a long time in my father's service and gave satisfaction in every way."

"All I could say was that there was a certain something about her which seemed to excite my distrust, and yet the woman has always taken extreme pains to please me in every way ever since I came to the house."

"Possibly I should not have had my attention drawn to her if I had not detected that she was engaged in watching me, just as if she suspected that I was not what I appeared to be," Joe Phenix explained.

"Of course, if she was honest, and all right, such an idea would never have entered her head."

"Exactly, and therefore as soon as I discovered that she seemed to have doubts about me I made up my mind she was the party I wanted, and so I kept my eyes on her as well as I could."

"Under the circumstances I had to be very careful not to allow her to see that I suspected her."

"Yes, it was not an easy task."

"I managed though to make out that she kept a good watch on the door, for whenever the bell rings she always contrives to be somewhere

in the neighborhood so as to be able to see who it is."

"That I presume is for the purpose of finding out whether I am in communication with detectives or not."

"Yes, undoubtedly, and to-day, while you were talking with the lawyer, and the insurance-agent, I heard the rustle of a woman's dress in the hall, and have an idea that it was this Mrs. Monford trying to overhear the conversation by listening at the keyhole."

"Very likely; and isn't it strange too when you come to think of it, that a woman who has been in the house as long as she has, holding a good position, well treated and well paid, should be foolish enough to risk everything by aiding these rascals."

"Yes, it is rather odd, but human nature is weak, and the best of us are prone to yield to temptation once in a while," the detective remarked in a reflective way.

"You see, they make the mistake of thinking that the risk is small, and there is very little danger of their getting caught."

"I suppose they do have that impression, but you would hardly think a woman like this Mrs. Monford could be induced to go into such a scheme, for she is no young, easily-influenced girl."

"There are wheels within wheels, you know, in all games of this kind," Joe Phenix remarked.

"This woman is English, and when she came to this country she was among strangers, none of whom knew anything in regard to the kind of life which she had led at home."

"I think the chances are good that she and the men who got away with the bonds are old acquaintances."

"Yes, very likely."

"Murphy is an English-Irishman, and as this job of cracking the safe is entirely out of his line—in fact, I feel pretty sure from what I have learned of the man that he could not possibly have done it—it shows that he must have had the assistance of some expert bank robbers."

"That certainly appears to be true," Mignon remarked.

"I have set on foot a careful examination, and have not been able to get on the track of any first-class safe-cracksmen, such as are competent to put through a job of this kind, and so I have come to the conclusion that the men who did the work are strangers."

"These two Englishmen, probably, who made Somerset's acquaintance on the steamer, and who are masquerading as young men desirous of going on the stage," Mignon exclaimed.

"Yes; I do not think there is a doubt that the pair are a couple of expert English cracksmen, and as this is the first job they have done on this side of the water, the police know nothing about them."

"That must be it."

"I will soon be in possession of information regarding them, though, if they are the kind of men I take them to be," Joe Phenix observed, in his grim, determined way.

"I got an accurate description of the men and then sent a cable dispatch to London, to Scotland Yard, asking if they had lost any A. No. 1 bank cracksmen who answered to the description of the pair."

"That was a shrewd movement," Mignon remarked in an admiring tone.

"It will probably result in my being able to discover whether I am correct in my surmise in regard to the men, for if I receive an answer that the description fits two professional English cracksmen—men known to be expert bank-robbers—and the English police have lost sight of them at present, it will be tolerably good proof that this pair are the men who did the job, particularly if I should discover that they are acquainted with, and in communication with Murphy."

"It will not be a difficult task to ascertain the truth in regard to that matter," the girl remarked.

"No, I do not think it will be, and I depend upon you to attend to that work," the veteran detective replied.

"I might put some shadows on the job, but if the pair are first-class rascals, such as I imagine them to be, the chances are great that they would discover they were being watched, and then, as they would immediately jump to the conclusion that suspicion was directed to them, they would be put on their guard, and it would be ten times as difficult to trap them," he explained.

"I think I will be able to do the work without exciting their suspicions," Mignon declared, confidently.

"I will be disappointed if you do not succeed," Joe Phenix remarked.

"By the way, I overheard your conversation with the lawyer," the detective said, abruptly changing the subject.

"And you must keep your eyes on him, for I am satisfied he is a rascal, and will swindle you if he gets a good chance," Joe Phenix continued.

"That is my idea, for I think he knows the Western lands were valuable—that is, if he examined into the matter at all. You can depend upon my keeping a sharp watch for him!" Mignon responded.

"And if he tries any sharp practice he will soon discover that he will be brought up with a round turn," the girl continued.

And this speech brought the interview to an end.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STAGE-STRUCK YOUTH.

ON the evening of the same day on which the interview between the lawyer and the heiress had taken place, Somerset sat in his room, enjoying a pipe, as was his usual custom after dinner.

The boarding-house pretended to be a stylish one, and the six-o'clock meal was termed dinner.

Just as the young Englishman got the pipe well under way there came a knock at the door, and in response to his "Come in," the two English crooks made their appearance.

It was the habit of Crickton and Clever Charley to drop in to the Englishman's room for a chat after dinner, and the reason for this proceeding was so they could find out whether any detectives had interviewed the young actor during the day.

It was a source of wonderment to the pair that the detectives had not made any endeavors to get on the track, and they were afraid that the bloodhounds of the law were trying to work some secret, underhand game.

Of course the idea had occurred to them that the detectives might have warned the young actor to keep the fact of their visit a secret, but they had so poor an opinion of Somerset—they considered him so soft—that they did not believe he would be able to keep the matter to himself, no matter how urgent was the warning.

Somerset bade his visitors to take chairs and make themselves comfortable, and after the pair were seated they got out their pipes and proceeded to help the actor fill the apartment with smoke.

"I can't help thinking about that strange adventure of yours," Crickton remarked.

"No more can I!" Clever Charley chimed in. "I think it is one of the oddest things that I ever heard of in my life!"

"Yes, and it was deuced unpleasant, too, while it lasted, I can tell you that!" the young Englishman declared, with a rueful shake of the head.

"Of course I knew I was perfectly innocent, although the railway shares were found concealed in my trunk, but for a time I really had considerable doubt whether I would be able to make it manifest that I had no guilty knowledge of the affair, for the officers were so certain I was the man they wanted, that I was very much afraid I would not be able to satisfy them that I knew nothing at all about the matter."

"In fact," he continued, if it had not been for Miss Lecount I don't believe I would have got out of the scrape without being put to serious trouble, for the officers did not seem to put any faith in what I said."

"Let me see, you had an interview with the lady after you were released, didn't you?" Crickton asked in a reflective way.

"Oh, yes, and she treated me in the kindest manner," Somerset remarked.

"Well, what was her idea about the matter?" the crook asked.

"She was completely in the dark, of course, just as I was, only she was satisfied that I spoke the truth when I declared that I knew nothing at all about the affair."

"But here is a point that I don't understand," Crickton remarked. "How was it that the attention of the detectives came to be directed to you at all?" the crook continued.

"Oh, don't ask me!" Somerset exclaimed. "Now you are getting in altogether too deep for me."

"Didn't the detectives say anything to solve the mystery?" Clever Charley asked.

"Well, really, just now I can't recall that they did, but, you see, I was so amazed, and bewildered, at the time that I really don't remember exactly what they did say."

"As far as I can see, from what you relate about the matter, the lady did not seem to be much affected by her loss, and that appears to me to be very strange," Crickton remarked.

"Yes, that is true enough. She certainly took the matter very coolly, but then she is a very odd girl, and always was; not at all like the common run of women."

"Well, I suppose she thought that it would not do her any good to worry over the matter," Crickton observed.

"I presume she made up her mind to set the detectives to work and trusted to them to clear up the mystery."

"It may be so; I presume that is likely," the young actor remarked in a thoughtful way.

"Didn't she say that she was going to put the detectives on the track?" Clever Charley asked.

"I can't recall that she did," Somerset responded, reflectively. "In fact, to the best of my recollection she didn't say what action she intended to take."

"I do not doubt that she will though, for, of course, that is the proper thing for her to do."

"The first move the detectives will make will

be to come here and interview you," Crickton suggested.

"Yes, I suppose so, but, bless me! I cannot give them any information in regard to the matter!" the young actor declared.

"All I know, Miss Lecount and the fellows who arrested me know, and that is that the railway shares were secreted in my trunk, but how they came in the trunk, and who put them there, I have not the remotest idea."

"Well, I have been meditating about the matter," Crickton remarked, slowly. "And as far as I can see there are no suspicious characters in the house, with the exception of the two young fellows in the next room, and, I think, that a little mild gambling, and playing the races are about all the charges which could be brought against them."

"Oh, yes, they are rather inclined to go it at a pretty fast rate, but I do not think they would go in for any big game of this kind," Somerset observed.

"And, really, if the detectives try to cross-examine me about the matter I should hesitate to say anything to cast suspicion upon them," the young Englishman remarked in conclusion.

"You are quite right, I think!" Crickton declared. "I do not believe there is anything bad about the pair—that is, I hardly imagine they would take part in a big robbery of this kind, although if they got a chance to rope a man into a game of cards I don't believe they would hesitate to win all the money he had."

"I think that is quite likely, Somerset coincided.

The conversation at this point was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in!" Somerset exclaimed.

The door opened and a youth of eighteen, or nineteen, made his appearance.

He was a good-looking boy, although his hair which curled in little crispy ringlets, all over his head was of a reddish hue, his complexion was dark and of an unhealthy appearance; then too he had a sort of a swagger, and an air which seemed to suggest that he was old beyond his years.

He was neatly dressed in a dark suit, but wore a flashy red necktie in which an imitation diamond pin was stuck.

"Mr. Somerset?" the new-comer asked, inquiringly, as he halted in the doorway.

"That is my name," the young Englishman replied.

"My uncle spoke to you about me, I believe," the youth remarked.

"I'm Uriah," he continued. "And nunky said you would speak a good word for me with some of the theater managers you know."

"Ah, yes, come in and help yourself to a chair!" Somerset exclaimed, rising and shaking hands with the young man in a hospitable way.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable!"

Then the young actor introduced the two crooks as Randolph and Percy Howard, giving the names by which he knew them, and he it said in passing that Somerset had not the slightest suspicion that the pair were anything but what they represented themselves to be.

The youth expressed himself as being delighted to make the acquaintance of the gentlemen, and then he sat down.

"Just arrived in the city?" Somerset asked.

"Yes, I got nunky's letter this morning, so I started right away," the youth replied.

"You see, I thought the quicker I got here the better it would be for me," he explained. "What do you think the chances are of my getting in with some good party?"

"Well, I don't want to discourage you, but the theatrical profession is overcrowded just like all the rest of the professions, and for every situation there are about ten applicants," Somerset replied.

"Oh, yes, that is the same old gag!" the youth exclaimed. "But you cannot scare me off with any talk of that kind!" he continued.

"I ain't any old professional, then I ain't any amateur either, for I have traveled with a couple of shows, regular little fly-by-night, barn-storming snaps, so I have been broke in all right, and I am up to the time of day!"

The crooks laughed; this slangy young fellow was a lad just to their taste.

"I think you will do!" Crickton declared.

"You will get along all right beyond a doubt."

"If you don't meet with any pullbacks,"

Clever Charley suggested with a comical expression.

"Oh, I am not afraid of anything of that kind!" the youth replied with a confident air.

"I reckon I can hold my own if I get half a chance," he continued. "I may be from the country, but whoever picks me up for a flat will make a big mistake."

"Oho! you have got your eye-teeth cut, eh?" Crickton asked.

"Yes, you can bet your life that I went through that operation a long time ago," the youth declared in a knowing way.

"I will do what I can for you," Somerset remarked, not particularly impressed by the youth's manner, for he did not admire these forward young men who thought they knew everything.

"Although, really, I do not suppose I will be able to be of much assistance to you," the young Englishman continued.

"About all I can do is to introduce you to the managers who want people, and then you will have to do your best to make them think you are just the fellow they want."

"Oh, yes; I know how that is," the youth replied. "And you can depend upon my talking to the coves like a Dutch uncle," he added.

"I left my trunk at the depot, by the way, because nunky wrote me that I had better see you first about getting board here before I had the trunk sent up."

"There will not be any difficulty in arranging that matter," Somerset replied. "There is a vacant hall bedroom on this floor which you can get for about six dollars a week, I think."

"That will be all right!" the youth exclaimed. "I can stand that pressure without any trouble. The old woman down in the country gave me two saw-bucks when I came away, so I am flush just now."

"Really, your saw-bucks are too much for me," Somerset responded. "What do you mean by two saw-bucks?"

"Why, two tens—two X's, you know. Say! I guess you ain't been long enough on this side of the water to understand good United States talk yet."

The Englishmen laughed.

"That is a fact, when you try any lingo of that sort," Somerset replied.

"The old lady—nunky's wife, you know—has got an idea that I will make my eternal fortune on the stage one of these days, and so, although she is awful close-fisted as a rule, she shells out the ducats pretty liberally for me."

"That is the kind of a relation to have!" Crickton declared.

"Oh, yes, they are very handy to have in the house!" Clever Charley exclaimed.

"I thought that twenty would last me for a couple of weeks, and I reckoned I ought to be able to get something to do in that time," the youth explained.

"Well, you may, but I think the chances are against it," Somerset remarked.

"You see, as you are a stranger, none of the managers know you, and it is natural for them to take people they are acquainted with, if it is possible for them to get them," he explained.

"Well, when the money is gone, it will be easy enough for me to strike the old woman for more!" the youth replied in his careless, happy-go-lucky way.

"She will stand a pull for another twenty; maybe a couple more, if I work the trick in the right way," Uriah continued.

"I will give her a lot of taffy, you know, about how rosy everything looks, and how big the chance is that in a week or so I shall get a splendid engagement for big money!"

"Ah, yes, I see that you understand how to wheedle the cash out of the old woman!" the cracksmen exclaimed.

"He is the chap that can do the trick!" Clever Charley declared.

The impression the forward youth produced on the pair of rascals was exactly the opposite to the one which the young actor received, for they had come to the conclusion that the new-comer was unusually smart, for his peculiar cheeky way excited their admiration.

"Oh, I'm up to the time of day!" Uriah declared.

"You will not be able to go round with the boys much if you think to make a tenner last you a week," Crickton suggested.

"I don't know about that!" the youth replied, in a confident way. "When I go with the gang it don't usually cost me much!" he declared.

"How do you work it?" Crickton asked.

"Yes, that is what I would like to know," Clever Charley remarked. "You must be smarter than I am, for I can't travel around with the boys without its costing me a good bit of money."

"Well, I am a lucky chap, you see!" the youth declared with a grin.

"Whenever I throw dice, sixes always come up; in fact, it is just as easy for me to throw sixes as it is for other people to throw deuces and trays!"

"Ah, come now! you are trying to run a rig on us!" the cracksmen declared.

"Oh, yes, trying to stuff us as though we were a lot of geese!" Clever Charley suggested.

"It is a sure enough fact—I wish I may die if it isn't!" Uriah replied.

"And when it comes to cards, I generally manage to hold my own without any trouble," the youth continued. "And so between cards and dice I can manage to get a living if there are flats enough around with money in their pockets, to be picked up."

Somerset regarded these words as the mere idle boasts of a foolish boy who had not seen much of the world, and so he thought it advisable to give him a caution.

"If you will take my advice you will steer clear of work of that kind," he remarked. "You may be very clever at that sort of thing, but in a big city like New York you will be apt to meet parties who get a living in that way,

and it stands to reason that you will not get the best of them."

"Oh, I am not at all afraid but what I will be able to hold my own with any of them!" the youth declared in a boastful way.

Somerset shook his head at this speech for he saw it would be only a waste of words to endeavor to advise such a headstrong youth.

"Well, experience will probably teach you that you are no match for the hawks and wolves of a big city," the young actor remarked.

Then he took the youth down-stairs and introduced him to the boarding-house mistress.

Arrangements were speedily made for Uriah's accommodation, and then the pair retraced their steps to the upper region.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PECULIAR PIECE OF WORK.

WHEN Somerset and the youth came to the upper hall they found Crickton pacing up and down, with his pipe in his mouth, while Clever Charley sat in the doorway of the room occupied by the two, also smoking.

"Did you arrange all right?" Crickton asked.

"Oh, yes," Somerset answered. "He is to have the hall bedroom."

"You are next door to us, then," Clever Charley remarked.

"You have a nice room," Uriah observed, pausing at the door and glancing into the apartment, which was a good-sized one, with a large double bed, and a commodious wardrobe placed against the side-wall.

"That is a handy piece of furniture," the youth remarked, his attention immediately attracted to the wardrobe.

"You have one just like it in your room," Somerset said, opening the door of the hall bedroom as he spoke.

The apartment was a small one, and scantily furnished, containing only a small, single bed, a bureau, washstand, one chair and a wardrobe placed against the side-wall.

"This will do first-rate!" the youth exclaimed, as he advanced into the room and cast a glance around.

"It is rather close quarters," he continued. "But a man mustn't expect to get the earth for six dollars a week."

"Now, I will hunt up an expressman to get my trunk, and then I will be all right."

After the youth departed Crickton indulged in a laugh, and remarked:

"That youngster will never be hung for his bashfulness."

"No, or not for having a good opinion of himself," Clever Charley declared.

"Boys will be boys," Somerset observed, with the air of a philosopher. "But it is likely that if he remains for any length of time in the city, that he will have some of the conceit taken out of him."

"Oh, yes, it takes the big city to knock the nonsense out of a man!" Crickton exclaimed.

By this time the three had finished their pipes, and then went out for a walk, so that upon the youth's return he found the upper story deserted.

"Hello! has everybody gone out?" he exclaimed in a loud tone when he reached the top of the stairs.

"Then in order to be sure that this was so, he knocked on all the doors; five apartments led from the entry, and after knocking, upon not receiving an answer he opened the doors and took a survey of the apartments.

None of the doors were locked so he was able to pursue his investigations without any trouble.

As he had anticipated he had the floor to himself.

The entry was lit by a large coal-oil lamp, held in a bracket on the wall, so he had plenty of light for his investigations.

The apartment occupied by the two crooks was the last one he came to, and as the door of it was directly opposite to where the lamp hung on the wall a flood of light poured into the room when he opened the door.

"Fortune is certainly favoring me this time!" the youth murmured with a deal of satisfaction in his tones as he looked into the room.

The wardrobe in this room stands so the wall is between its back and the back of the one in mine, and if I had had the arranging of the matter I could not have planned it better."

Then he closed the door, entered his own apartment and lit the lamp. After the room was illuminated, the youth drew the window curtain down, then went to the door, turned the key in the lock, and hung a towel on the door-knob in such a way that it rendered it impossible for any one in the entry to peer through the keyhole and see what was going on in the room.

He had gone to the Bowery in order to get an expressman, and on his way back made a call at a hardware store where he purchased, a small cold chisel, a couple of large gimlets, a compass saw, a good-sized screw-driver and a small mallet.

Uriah wore a light overcoat and was able to hide the tools in the pocket of the loose sack coat which he wore, so that no one could guess that he had them.

After fixing the door, the youth, with a

strength which it did not seem possible he could possess, moved the wardrobe out from the wall, and taking the colored "comforter" from the bed, spread it along on the carpet, close to the baseboard, in the space where the wardrobe had stood.

Then with the tools he set to work on the wall.

First with his pencil he marked out a space about a foot square, then with the cold chisel, the screw-driver and the mallet he removed the plaster, working with great rapidity and being careful to make as little noise as possible, the bits of plaster falling on the comforter.

He had taken care before commencing the work to sound the wall so that no stick of timber was in the way.

When the plaster was removed, leaving the laths bare, he attacked them with the gimlet and saw and soon had both sets of laths removed, the one on his side of the wall, and those to which the plastering of the other wall was attached.

The removing of the second line of laths was a difficult job, for it was the youth's intention not to damage the paper of the wall in the crooks' apartment, if such a thing were possible, although even if there had been a hole, the wardrobe being against it would have hidden it from sight.

But carefully as he worked it was not possible for him to complete the task without tearing the paper, but he had provided against such an accident, for he had a bottle of mucilage and some sheets of plain, white paper, which he pasted over the breaks, so that any one examining the wall from the large apartment would never have suspected that in this particular spot all that separated the rooms was a thin sheet of paper.

The task completed, the youth turned his attention to the wardrobe.

The board in the back of the piece of furniture which came against the hole he removed, cut it and fixed it in such a way that he could from the inside of the wardrobe take it out.

After this was done he gathered up all the rubbish in a newspaper, moved the wardrobe back to its place, then unlocked his door and made a trip to the street, where he got rid of the stuff in a convenient ash-barrel.

Returning to the room he paused in the center of it and glanced thoughtfully around.

"So far I have got along splendidly," he murmured.

By opening the door of the wardrobe, taking a seat in it, first removing the board, and placing my ear to the hole I shall be able to overhear every word which is spoken in the room, unless the parties in it take it into their heads to converse in whispers, which is not likely.

"How long I will have to wait before I get an opportunity to play the spy is a riddle which I am not able to solve at present," the speaker continued in a reflective way.

"One thing is certain, though. These men are bound to talk when they are alone together, and as they will not have any idea that it is possible for any one to play the listener, the chances are great that they will speak freely, and so I may be able to pick up some valuable information."

"The trap has been set, the bait is an extremely attractive one, and it will be wonderfully strange indeed if those fellows hesitate to walk into it," the youth declared.

Then an idea occurred to him.

"I will fix my door so it will look as if I am out, for if they should happen to settle down for a talk to-night, they will speak more freely if they think they are alone on the floor."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ATTRACTED BY THE BAIT.

THE youth proceeded to carry out the plan which had come to him.

He removed the key from the door, then extinguished the light, first replacing the towel which had masked the keyhole, after which he extended himself upon the bed.

"I shall probably have a good, long wait," he remarked, "for it is not likely that they will come in before eleven or twelve."

He had looked at his watch before extinguishing the light and noticed that it was only a few minutes after nine.

Hardly, though, had the youth composed himself comfortably on the bed when the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs, came to his ears.

He was up in an instant and hurried to the door, by which he crouched.

From the sounds, he judged there were three men, and this supposition became a certainty as they gained the landing.

Was it the crooks?

The three crossed the entry, and the listener heard the first one open the door of the adjoining apartment, and as he turned the door-knob he spoke:

"Here we are!" he said. It was the voice of the elder of the two Englishmen—the older brother, Randolph Howard, as he called himself, but Aaron Crickton, the cracksmen, in reality.

"It is rather high up, but it is very comfortable when you get in it," another voice remarked, and it was Clever Charley who spoke.

"Very tidy quarters," observed a third voice,

and the heart of the listener gave a great bound for he recognized the tones upon the instant.

It was Captain Murphy.

"I am in luck!" the youth muttered.

"The three are here together, and the chances are a thousand to one that they have come for the purpose of talking business, for otherwise they would not have been apt to be here."

The three entered the room.

The spy heard the scratch of a match, indicating that one of them was lighting the lamp, and then the door was closed.

With noiseless steps the youth stole to the wardrobe and removed the board from the back of it.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable," Crickton remarked, as the listener took his place with his ear to the hole in the wall, and, to the great joy of the eavesdropper, he discovered that he could hear every word just as distinctly as though he was in the room, although the speaker spoke in an ordinary tone of voice.

"This is good deal better than for us to attempt to talk about the business in the chop-house," Murphy observed.

"Yes, there was a regular mob in there to-night," Clever Charley declared.

"One of those imported English fighters has taken up his quarters there, so the landlord told me to-night, and such fellows always have a crowd running after them," Crickton explained.

"There wasn't any chance for a man to get a quiet corner there to-night," Murphy remarked.

"But I say, pal, is it perfectly safe for us to speak here—no danger of our conversation being overheard?" he continued.

"Oh, no! this is all right!" Crickton declared, in a confident way.

"All the fellows on this floor are night birds, actors, you know," he explained. "And they never get in until around midnight, so we have the floor to ourselves."

"How about that young imp who came to-night?" Clever Charley asked. "He may be in, and he has the next room, although if we speak in an ordinary tone of voice, I don't think he would be able to overhear our conversation, even if he tried to listen."

"He is none too good to be up to any kind of a game, if he thought there was any money in it!" Crickton declared.

"Ah, yes, he is a bad egg, and no mistake! But it wouldn't be possible for him to guess that we are up to anything; I think the chances, though, are that he isn't home."

"I will soon find out," Crickton remarked, and the eavesdropper could hear him rise to his feet.

"But as he started to the Bowery to hunt up an expressman about an hour ago, the odds are big that he hasn't got back yet, for the Bowery possesses wonderful attractions for a lad of this kind, who has a few dollars in his pocket and thinks he is up to the time of day."

"He is safe not to turn up until round about midnight," Clever Charley asserted.

As the crook proceeded to the entry the eavesdropper closed the door of the wardrobe, and made haste to crawl under the bed, for the thought came to him that it might be possible for the Englishman to possess a skeleton key which would give him admittance to the room.

But Crickton did not proceed thus far, contenting himself with first knocking on the door, and then when no answer came, trying to get in, calling out:

"Hey! are you asleep?"

There being no response to this, he returned to his apartment, while the youth made haste to crawl out from under the bed and resume his post of observation.

"It is all right!" Crickton reported, as he entered the room, closed the door carefully behind him, and resumed his chair.

"The young cub hasn't come back, and the fool has locked the door of his room as though he was afraid that some one would carry off the apartment while he was gone."

"He is safe enough until midnight as I said," Clever Charley remarked. "Not that I think it makes much difference, for even if he was in his room he would not be able to understand what we were saying, for I remembered that I wanted to get a match once from the chap in there, and I had to bawl at the top of my lungs to make him hear me."

"It was just as well to examine and see how the thing was," Murphy remarked. "There isn't anything like being on the safe side, you know."

"Correct?" the cracksmen declared.

"You are right, there's nothing like going in for sure things!" Clever Charley assented.

"Well, pals, now we will come down to business," the captain remarked. "I think this little game I was telling you about—the diamond business, you know—"

"Ah, yes, the diamonds, that's the ticket!" Crickton exclaimed with a deal of satisfaction.

"The dear little sparklers!" Clever Charley cried. "I am very fond of diamond jobs, if you please!"

"As I was saying, I think the plum is about ripe," Murphy observed.

"If it is ripe the quicker it is picked the better!" the cracksmen declared.

"Oh, bless me, yes!" Clever Charley chimed in. "There isn't any doubt about that, you know!"

"It is going to be a good stroke of business—better even than the other!" Murphy declared.

"Oh!" cried both the crooks in a breath.

"It is the truth I am telling you, old pals," the captain responded.

"You are saying a good deal, my dear fellow, when you say that it is better than the other. That was a fifteen thousand dollar job, and the stuff was in such a shape that it could be 'melted' without any trouble," the cracksmen observed in a reflective way.

"Diamonds ain't United States bonds, you know," Clever Charley declared. "Although diamonds are pretty handy things to 'melt' too, and a man can almost always find a fence who is willing to give a good price for sparklers, as it is no easy matter to trace and identify them after they are taken out of their setting."

"There is to-night in that same safe where we nipped the bonds, twenty-four thousand dollars' worth of diamonds," Murphy remarked.

"Oh!" exclaimed the crooks again in concert, drawing a long breath.

"Yes, pals, that is just what the young woman paid for the sparklers, and I have figured the thing out so it will be the softest kind of a snap for us to go in and collar the swag!" the captain declared.

"That is just what we are looking for!" the cracksmen declared.

"Oh, yes, the softer the snap and the bigger the game the better we will like it," Clever Charley remarked.

"As you justly observed, diamonds are not United States bonds, and it is not so easy to get rid of the sparklers as it is to 'plant' the bits of paper," Murphy said in a reflective way.

"But I really think that if we succeeded in getting away with the diamonds for which this young woman paid twenty-four thousand dollars cash on the nail, we ought to be able to get sixteen or eighteen thousand for them, for that would allow the fence to make from three to four thousand dollars, for the settings don't amount to much in this case, the value is all in the jewels."

"I don't think you have made any mistake in that calculation," the cracksmen responded.

"Oh, no, for a swag of that kind we ought to be able to collar sixteen thousand—or fifteen at the very lowest," Clever Charley observed.

"I think so, and that is the reason why I said the game was better than the other," Murphy declared.

"We will call it just as good and let it go," Crickton suggested.

"But I say, old pal, do you know that I think your being able to strike two such plays as this, one right after the other, is one of the luckiest strokes of fortune that I ever heard of," the cracksmen continued.

"Ah, yes, you can bet all your coin on that!" Clever Charley exclaimed.

"That is true, no doubt about it!" Murphy replied. "A man would be counted extremely lucky to strike two such games as this in a year, to say nothing of getting the chance to win both of them in a single month."

"How soon do you think we can work the trick?" Crickton asked.

"Well, I don't see any reason why we cannot pull it off to-morrow night," responded the captain.

"The swag is there waiting for us, and we might as well take it as quickly as possible," he continued.

"Certainly, no doubt about that!" the cracksmen assented.

And then, as a sudden thought occurred to him, a grave look came over his face, and he shook his head.

"What is it?" asked Murphy, guessing from the looks of the cracksmen that some novel and important idea had come to him.

"I say, old pal, don't you think it is sort of queer that the young woman should not be afraid to trust her sparklers in the safe, after the mysterious way in which the bonds disappeared?" Crickton asked.

"Oh, no! I forgot to explain about that," the captain replied.

"The young woman has got a very peculiar idea in her head in regard to the bonds, and that is the reason why she hasn't taken any steps to put the detectives on the case, after the police captain and his men slipped up on the job."

"Oh, is that so?" Crickton asked.

"What wrinkle has she taken into her noddle now?" Clever Charley asked, his curiosity excited.

"She does not believe the bonds were ever in the safe!" Murphy related.

"Oh! is that her idea?" Crickton exclaimed.

"Well, under the circumstances, it isn't unreasonable for her to get a notion of that kind," the second crook remarked, with a wise shake of the head.

"She never saw the bonds, and her father never spoke to her about them," the captain explained.

"But how does she get over the lawyer's state-

ment that he saw them in the safe?" Crickton asked.

"She thinks he made a mistake," Murphy replied. "The lawyer is a sort of flighty young duck, anyhow, and since the death of the father he has acted as if he would like to marry the daughter."

"Ah, yes, I see!" exclaimed the cracksman, "I understand the game now!"

Being up to all sorts of tricks himself, he was quite ready to believe evil of everybody else.

"The girl thought he got up the yarn about the bonds so as to make her think that he was devoted to her interests."

"Yes, that is about the idea she has, and, really, it does look as if he had been trying to play a game of that sort," Murphy observed with a chuckle.

"But, I say, what does she think of the railway shares that the peelers found in the actor's trunk?" Clever Charley asked in his shrewd way.

"There isn't any doubt but what they were in the safe," he added.

"Oh, she don't know what to make of that circumstance," the captain replied.

"That is a complete puzzle to her, of course," he continued.

"One thing though she feels certain of, and that is, the young actor didn't have anything to do with the matter. She has the most perfect faith that he spoke the truth when he said he did not know anything about how the shares came to be in his trunk," Murphy added.

"She is sort of sweet on him I suppose," Crickton suggested.

"I should not be surprised, and from what little she has said about the matter my informant suspects the young woman has a suspicion that, by some little hanky-panky game, either the police captain, or the detective, managed to get the railway shares out of the safe at the time the examination of its contents was made, and then having learned in some mysterious way that she was acquainted with Somerset they went to work to put up a job on him, which she blocked by refusing to believe that he could be guilty."

The crooks laughed outright.

"By George! old pal, this is about as rich a joke as I ever heard of in all my time!" the cracksman declared.

"Oh, yes, it is extra good and no mistake," Clever Charley assented.

"You have managed to get the affair so mixed up that it isn't possible for the parties to get at the rights of the matter," Crickton observed.

"Oh, yes, that has been my little game right from the beginning, of course," the captain remarked, complacently.

"I wanted to cover up our tracks so that none of the bloodhounds of the law would be able to smell us out, and I certainly think I have succeeded most completely!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SECRET AGENT.

THE crooks agreed that Murphy had managed the affair in a masterly manner, and Crickton remarked:

"A better planned job I never had a hand in, and yet I have taken part in some very deep games, too."

"So have I!" Clever Charley declared. "But I am free to confess that this goes ahead of anything I ever worked, and it does you proud, old pal, and there isn't any two ways about it!"

"I could not have managed the thing so well if I hadn't had the luck to have a secret agent in the house," Murphy explained.

"Ah, yes, of course; and your pal put you up to the time of day right along," the cracksman remarked.

"A pal of that kind is worth having," Clever Charley declared.

"By the way, old chap, who is it?"

"Yes; put us onto the game!" Crickton exclaimed.

Murphy shook his head.

"Ah, no, boys! I couldn't think of doing it!" he replied.

"It would not do you any good to know who it is that I have in the house," the captain continued.

"The information is all that is needed, and I will attend to that."

"Oh, then you will not give it away?" the cracksman asked, and then he laughed as if he had made a witty speech.

"Ah, don't trouble your head about it. What difference does it make?" Clever Charley inquired, and then he, too, indulged in a prolonged chuckle, much to Murphy's surprise.

"What the deuce do you fellows mean—what are you grinning at, anyway?"

"By the way, Murphy, where is your wife now?" Crickton asked in an innocent way, and then both he and Clever Charley laughed outright.

"Oho! you have spotted my game, eh?" the captain remarked, in a tone which showed he was annoyed.

"Yes, and just by the merest accident in the world," Crickton replied.

"Clever and I were out for a stroll this after-

noon, and as we were going through Forty-second street, we caught sight of a lady on the opposite side of the way going into a butcher's shop."

"We spotted her in a moment and I says to Clever, 'If that isn't Murphy's wife I'm a Dutchman!'"

"And I says to my old pal here, 'You are no Dutchman, for that is Mrs. Murphy, and isn't she in fine feather?'" Clever Charley observed.

"Then we made up our minds to lay low and find out just what game the woman was playing, thinking we were doing you a service, you know," and here the crook laid back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Yes, we hadn't any idea, you see, that you knew the woman was in the country, and so we were going to run her down for you; such a lark!" and then Clever Charley chuckled.

"So we waited until she got out of the butcher's, taking care that she shouldn't catch sight of us, then I posted into the shop."

"The butcher was a soft young chap, and I had no difficulty in getting the information out of him."

"Wasn't that Mrs. General Smith who lives on Fifth avenue, near Fortieth street—the lady in black who just went out?" I said.

"Oh, no," replied the butcher. "Not at all! That is Mrs. Monford, the housekeeper for Mr. Lecount the minister 'round here in Madison avenue—the gentleman who just died."

"That let the cat out of the bag immediately," the captain remarked.

"Oh, yes, then we understood all about the little game you had played just as well as though we had planned it ourselves," Crickton remarked.

"But I say, old pal, how in the name of wonder did you ever contrive to get the dame into a house like that?" the cracksman questioned.

"I didn't have anything to do with it; she worked the trick herself," Murphy replied.

"Well, I always had the idea that she was an uncommon smart woman, although I never fancied that she was particularly anxious to do much in our line," Crickton remarked.

"Old pale, she is as smart as a steel-trap if she only wants to be!" the captain declared.

"But she is a very peculiar woman," he continued in explanation.

"She is like the toper who drinks to excess and then swears off."

"The woman is as keen as lightning, and she will work a game to the queen's taste for a year or so, and then suddenly make up her mind that it is a mighty risky business, and that she will not have anything more to do with it."

"Ah, yes, I see, and then she makes up her mind to try the honest lay," Crickton observed.

"And she gives the crooked life a go-by!" Clever Charley added, with a grin.

"Yes, that is the kind of game she plays," Murphy remarked.

"She comes of a good family, and has been well brought up, a fine education, and all that sort of thing, but she was always willful and headstrong," he continued, in explanation.

"Maybe if her mother hadn't died when she was only a young girl she would have been a different sort of a woman, for the father was a wild, reckless sort of a man, and allowed the girl to do about as she liked."

"Her governor was in business, and thought to be a prosperous man, but he got into difficulties, forged his friends' names right and left, and then when the peelers nabbed him, rather than go before the beak, he put a pistol to his head and died like a gentleman."

"Ah, yes, but a thing of that sort is a big mistake, you know!" the cracksman declared.

"A man is a fool to kill himself just because he has come to skilly!" he continued.

"Them is my sentiments to a hair!" Clever Charley declared. "Never say die! No matter if the luck is running dead against you, the tide is bound to turn if you will only have patience enough to wait for it."

"Many men of many minds, you know," the captain replied. "He had played a bold game—the cards had gone against him, and he wasn't willing to stay in the world, and face the consequences, so he took the shortest road out."

"The daughter was left alone to take care of herself, but as she had a good education she had no difficulty in getting a situation as governess, and she got along all right for six or seven years, until she made the acquaintance of a young Frenchman, a regular swell, who fell in love with her, but she was no fool, you know, and wouldn't be flattered by his soft speeches, until at last he offered to marry her."

"She thought the chance was a good one, consented, and they were married."

"Four months afterward the frog-eater deserted her and went back to France."

"Ah, yes, that is the game they generally play," the cracksman observed.

"She was plucky and followed him, but when she found him in France, and set up a claim that she was his wife, she discovered to her dismay that her English marriage wasn't good in France, and her husband and his friends laughed at her."

"That was bad treatment," Clever Charley remarked.

"Yes, she had never been remarkable for the

sweetness of her temper, and now she became about crazy."

"She got a pistol, laid in wait for the man and shot him."

"That was a bold move!" Crickton declared.

"As it happened she did not kill the man, but lamed him for life. She was tried and got a five years' sentence; those French judges are queer ducks, you know, and she came within an ace of getting off altogether on account of extenuating circumstances, as they put it."

"After she came out of prison she went back to London, and while she was living in furnished rooms there, trying for a situation, I happened to make her acquaintance, having a room in the same house. I was in good feather just then and we took a fancy to each other, but when I asked her to marry me she refused on account of the trouble she had been in, and made no bones of telling me her story; then the thought came to me as I listened to her that she was just the kind of woman I wanted."

"Her life had been ruined, she hated the world, which had always treated her so badly, and didn't care what she did."

"Ah, yes, I can understand just how she felt!" the cracksman declared.

"So I was as frank and honest with her as she was with me—told who and what I was. We soon struck up a bargain, and she turned out to be the best pal I ever had."

"I have always heard all the 'cross' men speak well of her," Clever Charley remarked.

"But at last we came to grief, the bobbies nailed me fast, and I got a three years' sentence, but the wife got over to France; from there came to this country, as the detectives were so hot after her that she had no rest."

"After I had been locked up for six months I broke jail—there were three of us in it—and in a fight with the police my two companions were killed, but by a mistake it was given out that I was one of the dead men and it was so published in the newspapers."

"Yes, I remember the circumstance," Crickton remarked.

"The wife read about it, believed the account to be true, and so made up her mind to stay in this country," the captain explained.

"She had a good place in the minister's house, and there she stayed, keeping as straight as a string until I happened to meet her about three months ago."

"And then you got up this little game that we worked so successfully," Crickton suggested.

"Yes; and if we put this new scheme through all right, we have made up our minds to quit this kind of life," Murphy explained. "We have money enough to give us a good send-off, and we will go out West and start a hotel or something of that kind."

"That is a good idea," Crickton declared. "For a man is bound to be nailed in the long run if he keeps on."

"Ah, yes, it is the old story, the pitcher which goes often to the well is certain to be broken at last," Clever Charley observed.

"Yes, it is always wise to let well enough alone," the captain declared.

"I will admit that I would like to get another crack at this minister's daughter, so as to satisfy the grudge I owe her on account of my dead pal, whom she hounded to his grave," he continued. "But I will have to satisfy myself with getting away with her bonds and her diamonds."

"Well, it strikes me that you are getting considerable satisfaction out of her as it is," Clever Charley observed.

"I will have to be content," the captain replied.

"To-morrow night, then, we will do the trick?" the cracksman asked.

"Yes, we will meet at the chop-house at twelve, and we can loaf there for an hour or so, and then work the game," Murphy explained.

"All right! we will be on hand!" Crickton replied.

"Oh, yes, you need not fear that we will be among the missing!" Clever Charley declared.

And this ended the conference, as far as the schemes of the crooks were concerned.

A few idle words were exchanged in reference to how the three would pass the rest of the night, until bedtime, and then the three took their departure.

The eavesdropper stole cautiously to the key-hole, and listened to the receding footfalls, until the clang of the front door told that the three had passed into the street.

The youth sat down to reflect.

"The bait has attracted them all right, as I anticipated it would," he murmured.

"Joe Phenix, too, was right in his conjecture that the housekeeper was the spy."

"It was Mrs. Monford who gave the police captain the information in regard to Mr. Somerset, which led to the finding of the shares in his trunk, but now I think we will succeed in getting these cunning rascals into a trap from which they will not be able to escape."

Then the youth rose to his feet.

"I must seek Joe Phenix at once and reveal to him this important information, so he will have time to prepare his plans."

Five minutes later the youth was on his way.

CHAPTER XXXV.

INSNARED.

THE witching hour of midnight had long past, and the clocks of the metropolis showed that the hour of one was near, when the three crooks, Captain Murphy, "Blackie" Crickton and Clever Charley, came out of the English chop-house, and took their way through the cross street to Madison avenue.

"Isn't it rather early?" Clever Charley asked. "Even if we walk slowly we will be at the house by half past one."

"No, I think not," Murphy replied. "My wife tells me that since the death of the old man everybody in the house is in bed by eleven, but I have arranged a signal with her."

"She has a front room in the third story, and if the coast is not clear she will have a light burning."

"That is a good idea!" Crickton declared. "If the house is dark we will know that it is safe to go ahead."

"Yes, that is the programme," the captain replied.

"Shall we do the trick the same as before?"

"Exactly the same," Murphy answered. "Everything will be prepared for us. We will go in by the basement door, and then proceed upstairs."

"The back room is now occupied by an old gentleman, a retired minister, and as he always goes to bed at ten o'clock there isn't any danger to be apprehended from him."

"Old buffers of that stamp always sleep like tops, anyway!" Crickton declared.

"I do not anticipate that we will have any trouble in getting away with the swag," the captain remarked in a confident way.

"In fact, it is my opinion that we will have more trouble in getting rid of the sparklers than we will have in getting them," he continued.

"Oh, if we once get our fingers on the diamonds I will go bail we will be able to turn them into cash fast enough!" the cracksman declared.

"Ah, yes, I am not worrying at all about that!" Clever Charley asserted.

As they conversed the three proceeded onward at a moderate gait, and, as Clever Charley had anticipated, it was just half-past one when they arrived in sight of the Lecount mansion.

All was dark—not a ray of light came from any window in the house.

"All is serene, boys," Murphy remarked. "The glim has been doused, and that is a sign that everybody in the house is in bed, and, doubtless, sound asleep."

"Really these two things are the softest games I ever struck!" Crickton declared.

"Yes, the only trouble is that they are so blessed easy that when we strike a hard job we will be apt to be disgusted with it after these soft snaps," Clever Charley remarked with a grin.

As the three came up to the house they cast a quick glance around.

Not a soul was in sight.

The street was deserted.

Down to the basement door they went, proceeding with such careless ease that if any one had seen them the watcher would surely have been deceived into the belief that they had a perfect right to enter the house.

The basement door had been tampered with, so the three had no trouble in entering.

Upstairs they proceeded, stealing onward with noiseless steps, until they came to the door of the study.

Crickton produced his nippers and turned the key; then they advanced into the room, taking the precaution to close the door behind them.

Clever Charley had lit his dark lantern in the lower hall, so that it was all ready for use.

"Now, old chap, try your little hanky-panky business on the safe," Murphy remarked in a cautious tone.

"The combination has probably been changed since my last visit, but that doesn't make any difference to me," the cracksman observed, with a grin.

Then he knelt before the safe, while Clever Charley directed the rays of the lantern upon it.

For a few moments the cracksman manipulated the knob of the safe and then, with a triumphant exclamation, swung the door open.

"I have done the trick, pals, without any trouble!" he exclaimed in a self-satisfied tone.

"And there are the sparklers!" Murphy declared, drawing out the jewel boxes.

"Better open them, so as to be sure we have got the right ones," Clever Charley suggested.

Murphy did so, and the crooks could not forbear exclamations of delight as they looked at the diamonds.

"My eyes!" Clever Charley muttered in deep, suppressed tones. "I thought I had seen some very tidy sparklers in my time, but I never got a squint at anything like these in all my born days."

"They are magnificent!" the cracksman declared. "Why, they must be worth a king's ransom, as I heard a chap say in a play once."

"They will be worth fifteen or sixteen thousand dollars to us unless I am greatly mistaken," the captain declared, closing the boxes and stowing them away in his pockets.

"Now close the safe, and we will be off!"

Murphy continued, rising to his feet as he spoke.

"Tarry a while, gentlemen!" exclaimed a stern, deep voice.

And then, as if by magic, the room was flooded with light; the gas being lit by electricity it was an easy matter to do this.

Crickton and Clever Charley bounded to their feet, and all three of the crooks felt for a weapon.

In the doorway, which led to the dressing-room, stood Joe Phenix, a cocked revolver in his hand; behind him appeared Mignon, while Tony Western and another detective, also presenting revolvers, appeared at the entry door.

The surprise was complete.

"Do not attempt to offer resistance for it will only cost all three of you your lives!" the stern voice of the veteran detective warned.

A moment the three glared in the faces of their captors, and then Murphy, with a hoarse laugh, threw out his hands.

"The trick is yours, Phenix!" he cried. "It is not of any use for me to attempt to deny that you have got me dead to rights this time!"

"I warned you at our last meeting—also at the time when you had the good luck to slip through my fingers, that if you kept on in your career of crime I would surely nab you in the long run."

Then he addressed the other two.

"Although you are strangers to me, yet, thanks to the Atlantic cable and the Scotland Yard people, I am able to identify you, Aaron Crickton, commonly termed 'Blackie,' the king of safe-crackers, and Charles Thomason, better known as 'Clever Charley,' almost as equally renowned in the cracksman line."

"You are unlucky, boys, to be nailed in your second piece of work," the detective continued.

"Second? This is the first job I have done since I came to the country!" the cracksman declared.

"Oh, no! You three are the men who got away with the United States bonds," Phenix replied.

"You must not think to deceive me. I understand how the trick was worked."

"Your wife, Murphy, who is known in this house as Mrs. Monford, and is the housekeeper here, is the one who made it possible for you to do this work."

The crooks were amazed, and stared at the detective in wonder.

Was he a magician able to read the truth in men's faces?

"She has not been arrested, but a detective is at her door waiting my orders," Joe Phenix continued.

Miss Lecount here though knows her sad story and is reluctant to drag her to court, and if you will give up your share of the bonds she may go free.

"Your share of the plunder is already captured," he continued to the crooks. "Your apartment was searched this evening, and your receipts from the safe deposit company found."

The rogues were thunderstruck.

After a moment's thought Murphy accepted the offer made by Phenix, and the three were escorted from the house by Western and the other detective.

Our tale is told, and but a few more words remain to be said.

The crooks were convicted and speedily departed for the "stone boarding-house" up the river.

And it was the detective's spy who procured the evidence; none but those in the secret though suspected that Mignon, the heiress, was Joe Phenix's Unknown.

THE END.

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